A. C. WARD

Illustrated History of English Literature

VOLUME THREE

Blake to Shaw

THIS third and completing volume of the Illustrated History of English Literature covers rather more than a century and a half, from the death of Samuel Johnson in 1784 to the death of Bernard Shaw in 1950.

It opens with a brief glance at Rousseau, as a forerunner of the English rationalistic and revolutionary writers, before surveying the work of the Gothic novelists and of Blake and others in relation to the poetry of the great Romantics, each of whom is considered at some length.

The Scottish poets, critics, and novelists; women of letters from the Bluestockings to Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot; and all the major and many of the lesser writers of the nineteenth century are discussed, while the concluding chapters deal with the late Victorians and with their successors in the first half of the present century, excluding those who were still alive at the end of 1950.

In his comments and judgments Mr. Ward's purpose is neither to challenge nor to bolster orthodox opinions, but to communicate his own enjoyment of literature while giving a plain yet independent-minded account of the writers and their work.

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ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME THREE

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I. Charles Dickens by Daniel Maclise

ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME THREE

BLAKE TO BERNARD SHAW

by

A. C. WARD

ILLUSTRATIONS COLLECTED BY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS

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THE AUTHOR TO THE READER

No writer still living at the end of 1950 is discussed in this concluding volume of a survey of six centuries of English literature.

The history of criticism shows that while it is easy to do more, or less, than justice to living contemporaries it is impossible to do them plain justice. Taste and fashion move giddily around a circle. Although we cannot ourselves remain stationary it does us no harm to leave the roundabout as often as we can, steadying ourselves while others canter by. 'I have known four-and-twenty leaders of revolts': these last words of the legate in Browning's *A Soul's Tragedy* could be echoed with appropriate numerical adjustment by anyone familiar with the literature of the present century, and the sensible deduction is clear.

Furthermore, no writer's work can be reasonably assessed until it is completed, and since the terminal point I had set myself was 1950 I have closed the story at the date of Bernard Shaw's death in December of that year.

If this volume and its predecessors are judged by the yardstick method it will be evident that some major writers are given less than their strictly proportionate space. This is in some degree due to my own inclinations; but, more especially, I have allowed for the fact that while information about the greater people is common knowledge and their works are accessible to all, others of importance in the development of literature and ideas are less generally known and their writings now out of common reach.

I conclude by repeating what I have said in the preceding volumes: namely, that this History is addressed to those who read for enjoyment. Specialists with other and overriding purposes will look elsewhere. I trust that the pleasure and satisfaction I have had in writing the book will communicate itself to those who read it.

A. C. W.

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CHAPTER I

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

WITHIN a few years of Samuel Johnson's death in 1784 both the English literary scene and the political face of the world had changed in a way that would have added some further caustic pages to Boswell's record if Johnson had lived into the new age. By 1790 Burns and Blake had published unique works, and an oddly assorted body of women writers was swarming towards a full-scale invasion of literature. Johnson would have found these developments provoking, while the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 would have filled him with wrath and dread. He and Boswell had differed strongly about the American revolutionary war and also about the character of Rousseau, the harbinger of revolution. Boswell, after meeting Rousseau abroad, disapproved Johnson's verdict that 'Rousseau, Sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years.'[1] Nor did Boswell think better of Johnson's pamphlet *Taxation no Tyranny* (1775), published as 'an answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress'.

But Johnson could have been no more effective than Canute or Mrs. Partington[2] in staying tides or sweeping back oceans. The 'very bad man' from Geneva and the 'Rascals—Robbers—Pirates'[3] of America were the prophet and the heroes of the New Age, in which eighteenth-century ideas of order and stability were thrown aside.

No wholly acceptable descriptive term has been devised for the complex of opinions and tendencies which, developing in the latter half of the eighteenth century, dominated the nineteenth century, and, through processes of perversion and revulsion, were to become obsessive and destructive in the twentieth century. Such phrases as The Romantic Movement or The Romantic Revival have a too limited connotation; while The

[1] Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, 15 Feb. 1776.
[2] See below, p. 166.
[3] Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, 15 Apr. 1778.

Enlightenment,[1] though used here as a preferable alternative, has at various times been applied in contradictory senses: literally, by those who see the political phase of the movement as an ultimately irresistible drive towards the attainment of universal liberty, equality, and fraternity; sardonically, by those to whom the whole Romantic movement, in affairs and in literature, appears as the product of 'shallow and pretentious intellectualism', of 'unreasonable contempt for tradition and authority', of 'semi-information' and 'weak personal vanity'.[2]

The term is now sometimes extended, moreover, to embrace the whole period from Locke to Rousseau and his disciples, taking in Swift among early and mid eighteenth-century writers who may be considered obscurantist by 'advanced' thinkers. This confusion is largely due to the variable application in that century of the words 'reason' and 'common sense'. A latter-day authority on Swift, numbering him among the 'rational divines', speaks of the 'doctrines of common sense' as originating in 'the Restoration era . . . but maintained down through the eighteenth century. In fact it is their presence throughout the entire period bounded on one side by the Jacobeans and on the other by the romantics which leads us to speak of this century and a half as the period of the English Enlightenment.'[3] But by the time Tom Paine wrote *Common Sense* (1776) and *The Age of Reason* (1793), common sense and reason carried implications that Swift would have dowsed and shrivelled with satirical venom. Swift died in 1745. In 1751 the first volume of *L'Encyclopédie* was issued in Paris and the work continued until 1776, with Diderot and Voltaire among its moving spirits and Rousseau as a contributor on political economy—and on music. Not only the doctrines of 'rational divines' but all orthodoxy in religion and political officialdom were challenged by the encyclopædists' concern for scientific knowledge, truth, and tolerance, though no specific assault was made on existing things. The alarm among defenders of the old order was excited by the basic assumptions; and, indeed, ideas planted by *L'Encyclopédie* were soon to inspire a new revolutionary phase

[1] From *Aufklärung*, applied to Lessing (1729–81) and contemporary writers who freed German literature from bondage to French classicism.

[2] See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, under 'Enlightenment'.

[3] *Swift: An Introduction* by Ricardo Quintana (Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 36.

of the Enlightenment, even if it did not originate the movement to which that title might conveniently be limited.

In so far as, in the long run, it fostered popular education and social betterment The Enlightenment, thus limited, is a fit title for the movement. It is a misnomer, however, in relation to the subsequent emotional overbalance of Romanticism, that undisciplined leaning towards soft feeling as a refuge from the ardours of hard thinking. The 'sensibility' of the Romantics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could be, and was, lightly mocked by contemporaries as a foible, as the outcome of a mawkish tearful tender-heartedness; yet it was to have grim long-term consequences. Relaxation of mental control led not only to sentimentality but also to the brutality which is sentimentality's underside and the certain goal of anti-intellectualism. When divorced from reason, emotion is easily enslaved by passions which allow no concession to sense, justice, or mercy.

The ugliest paradox in history is that tender-heartedness and humanitarianism degenerated by slow stages into the ruthlessness of antagonistic though complementary ideologies. The roots of the paradox can in truth be found in Rousseau himself.[1] The ideals of moral education and behaviour he urged in *Émile* (1762) were at variance with his own personal conduct, even if it may be fair to add that his own unideal upbringing could be held responsible for some part at least of the scoundrelism of his maturity. 'Tender, anxious mother, I appeal to you . . . raise a wall about your child's soul . . . you alone should carry it into execution' he wrote at the beginning of *Émile*. Nevertheless he committed to a foundling institution his five illegitimate children by Thérèse le Vasseur, the hotel servant with whom he lived for a quarter of a century, though he professed no love for her. He entreated in *Émile*, through the words

[1] 'Rousseau's disciples contradicted each other as vigorously as his opponents did. . . . Long after the smoke of revolution and reaction had cleared away Rousseau was still praised or condemned for the widest variety of reasons. . . . He was called rationalist and irrationalist by turns; his economics was described as socialist or as founded on the sanctity of private property; his religion was seen as Deist, Catholic, or Protestant; his moral teachings were alternately held to be Puritanical or too emotional and relaxed.'—From the Introduction by Peter Gay to *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, by Ernst Cassirer (Columbia University Press, New York, 1954), p. 5.

of the Savoyard Priest he invented to state his creed, 'Let me follow the Inner Light; it will not lead me so far astray as others have done'. This appeal to the Inner Light, or the Voice of Nature, was music in the ears of the many to whom external authority in religion and politics was anathema: it seemed to promise the overthrow of tyranny, and, indeed, within thirty years the Revolution had overthrown the monarchy and the aristocracy. But though an Inner Light may glimmer in everyone, it does not, even at its brightest, assure singleness of vision, nor guarantee an invariable sense of direction. On the contrary, it leads to an endless variety of individual divagations which open the road to anarchy and chaos.

Rousseau's first sentence in *Émile* runs: 'God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil'.[1] In the same year (1762) he wrote *The Social Contract*, beginning its first chapter with 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.' The practical problem, as he saw it, was how to keep God's good man (the Natural Man) free within the framework of a civilized society, and this problem was his concern throughout *The Social Contract*: 'Some form of association must be found as a result of which the whole strength of the community will be enlisted for the protection of the person and property of each constituent member, in such a way that each, when united to his fellows, renders obedience to his own will, and remains as free as he was before'.[2] Rousseau was as illogical in thought as he was inconsistent in conduct, and the solution advocated in *The Social Contract* to establish the Rights of Man serves equally as the programme for a new despotism. The individual person was to alienate all his rights to the whole community, to subordinate his particular will to 'the general will', which is not, however, the sum total of every particular will but, rather, the residual will remaining after all conflicting self-interests have cancelled out: 'when the interests of individuals begin to make themselves felt, and lesser groups within the State to influence the State as a whole, then the common interest suffers a change for the worse and breeds opposition'.[3]

[1] Everyman's Library translation (Dent, London, 1911).
[2] Book I, ch. vi (The World's Classics translation: *Social Contract: Locke—Hume—Rousseau*. Oxford University Press, 1946).
[3] Book IV, ch. i.

THE CONTRAST.

1792.

Religion, Morality, Loyalty, Obedience to the Laws, Independence, Personal Security, Justice, Inheritance, Protection, Property, Industry, National Prosperity, Happiness.

Atheism, Perjury, Rebellion, Treason, Anarchy, Murder, Equality, Madness, Cruelty, Injustice, Treachery, Ingratitude, Idleness, Famine, National and private Ruin, Misery.

WHICH IS BEST?

The New Hearts of Oak.

1.

COME rouſe up my lads,
And defend the great Cauſe
Of our Country and King,
Our Religion and Laws;
Theſe, in ſpite of the maxims
Of Prieſtly and Paine,
Each true hearted Briton
Would die to maintain.

CHORUS.

Hearts of oak are our ſhips,
Hearts of oak are our men,
We always are ready,
Steady, boys, ſteady,
Be firm in the cauſe
Of our Country and King.

Though he was unaware of it, Rousseau's mind ran around a closed circle—away from the slavery of a despotic monarchy back to the slavery of a despotic pseudo-democracy embodied in the State, which would permit neither opposition nor minority opinion.

'*The Social Contract* became the Bible of most of the leaders in the French Revolution, but no doubt, as is the fate of Bibles, it was not carefully read and was still less understood by many of its disciples.'[1] Rousseau's advantage over contemporary political thinkers lay in his exceptional literary skill, and still more in that most dangerous and delusive of all literary gifts, the power of phrase-making. When Bertrand Russell guessed that *The Social Contract* was neither carefully read nor understood by those who adopted it as their Bible, he might reasonably have gone further and guessed that the majority were content with the hypnotic first sentence: 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains', which is still frequently repeated by those whom it still plunges into a thought-saving hypnosis.

Rousseau is of direct interest here only in so far as his writings and the actions traceable to them affected English literature. He gathered up the æsthetic and emotional sensibilities of the age, the political discontents, the humanitarian aspirations. In the realm of ideas he was much less an originator than a middleman possessed of a bemusing genius aided by an ample stock of potent phrases. He died rather more than ten years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, and when the new golden age Rousseau had contemplated turned soon into an age of blood, in the forefront of disillusioned Englishmen was William Wordsworth, whose early enthusiasm—

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very Heaven![2]

passed through stages of disillusion and dejection until the crowning of Napoleon by the Pope struck him as

> This last opprobrium, when we see a people,
> That once looked up in faith, as if to Heaven
> For manna, take a lesson from the dog

[1] Bertrand Russell: *History of Western Philosophy* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1946), Book III, Part 2, ch. xix.
[2] *The Prelude*, XI, 108–9.

Returning to his vomit; when the sun
That rose in splendour, was alive, and moved
In exultation with a living pomp
Of clouds—his glory's natural retinue—
Hath dropped all functions by the gods bestowed,
And, turned into a geegaw, a machine,
Sets like an Opera phantom.

Thomas Paine

One of the main delusions current in the period of the Enlightenment was the belief that Reason held a primary place among its guiding principles. The word is frequent in Rousseau's writings, and Paine's *The Age of Reason* is more an intemperate than a reasoned denunciation of orthodox religion. Obloquy settled immediately about Paine as a consequence of government opposition to his political views, and the detestation in which his religious convictions were held (though he was a sincere and earnest Deist, not an atheist) has never been entirely dispelled. His name and his books still carry an air of disrepute which has passed down through the generations and is rarely a direct product of any new examination of what he wrote.

Thomas Paine (1739–1809) was born on a small farm at Thetford in Norfolk and had his first notable brush with authority when he was thirty-five, being dismissed from the post of excise-officer on account of his agitating for higher pay for himself and others. He migrated to America in 1774 with letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. There he edited the *Pennsylvania Magazine* and, a few months after the beginning of the American revolutionary war, brought out the pamphlet called *Common Sense*, advocating an American Republic. He joined Washington's army, but his most useful service was still with the pen, for a further pamphlet *The American Crisis*[1] (the first of a series with that title) was read with good effect to the American troops at a time of discouragement in 1776. Like Rousseau, Paine could draw upon a fund of resounding phrases which owe more to feeling than to reason. *The American Crisis* is excellent rhetorical propaganda disdaining no extravagance of

[1] Reprinted in *A Miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets, XVI-XX Centuries*, edited by A. C. Ward (The World's Classics. Oxford University Press, 1927).

language calculated to stir men's emotions. It makes no matter that reason would be unlikely to conceive of George III as 'a being, who at the last day shall be shrieking to the rocks and mountains to cover him, and fleeing with terror from the orphan, the widow, and the slain of America'. Such incitements to regard the enemy as a terrifying bogyman are a commonplace in all war-time pamphleteering, but Paine had at least a sense of style and could use language with dignity as well as with enthusiasm: 'These are the times that try men's souls: the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered. . . .'

Paine returned to England in 1787 and in 1791–2 published in two parts his best-known work, *The Rights of Man* (a reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in 1790), with a dedication to George Washington. Here Paine united eloquence and practical sense, passing from a dialectical apologia for the French and American revolutions to a final chapter on 'Ways and Means of Improving the Condition of Europe'. There is nothing in his plan that would now dismay a British politician (except, possibly, the proposals for the remission of taxes and the reduction of government expenditure): indeed, most of the plan has been implemented in the Welfare State. Paine advocated family allowances, public education, old-age pensions, maternity benefit, marriage grants, full employment. But if in such respects *The Rights of Man* is outdated, it is, nevertheless, one of the few political discourses of its period that can still be read for the sake of its English style. It was held to be seditious at the time of its appearance and Paine moved to France to escape prosecution. There he endangered his life by speaking against the guillotining of the king and spent his last years in America, where he also fell into disfavour as an opponent of Washington and the Federal party.

Bage and Holcroft

The spirit of the Enlightenment found expression in English fiction as well as in political pamphlets. Robert Bage (1728–1801) turned after the bankruptcy of his papermaking business to the writing of novels which owe much to his reading of

Rousseau. Of his six books, which included *Man as He Is* (1792), one has survived in occasional reprints, *Hermsprong, or Man as He Is Not* (1796). Hermsprong is a fictional presentation of Rousseau's philosophical figment, the Natural Man. Knowing nothing of European moral or religious concepts, he is brought up among the aboriginals of northern America, through whom he becomes imbued with the virtues in which he finds the English deplorably lacking when at length he is set down among them. Bage had little merit as a novelist and no original contribution to make to the body of contemporary thought, but his works retain some interest as novelties and curiosities of literature, and as pioneer attempts at the political novel. Similar attempts were made in *Hugh Trevor* (1794) and other novels by Paine's friend Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809), who was by turns table-hand, shoemaker, teacher, and actor, before he settled to authorship, mainly as a playwright (*The Road to Ruin*, 1792, etc.). His *Memoirs* were brought out by Hazlitt in 1816, and autobiographical material entered largely into his novels, which were to some extent the self-consoling lucubrations of a social misfit. As compendiums of advanced political views they belong to the semi-literary family in which his friend Godwin's *Caleb Williams* is the principal member.

William Godwin

William Godwin (1756–1836) gleams across some two centuries, mainly with a reflected light. But for Shelley, far less would now be heard of Godwin; yet without Godwin the young geniuses who came into his circle would shine with less brilliance. Born at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, he had Calvinistic dissenting ministers as his father and his grandfather. As a child he seems to have paraded all the objectionable virtues, and was expert in the whole art of mental, moral, and religious priggery. After graduating at a London theological college, where he was imbued with the extremist form of Calvinism, Godwin became a Unitarian minister, but his sense of incapacity as a preacher and a course of reading in Rousseau and other political thinkers led him to abandon the ministry. In 1783 he took to literary drudgery for a livelihood. He was a sedulous but often needy author, a generous if short-tempered relative, a staunch friend

to Holcroft and others, and a man of unflinching though unflamboyant moral courage. Under Holcroft's influence he declared himself an atheist, and, fired by the French Revolution, went beyond the tenets of its leaders and embraced anarchism.

In 1793 Godwin issued *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, his most influential work, though its influence was a passing one and had virtually ceased by the time he died. It is neither possible nor necessary to attempt here any summary of *Political Justice*. As a prospectus of human perfectibility it had a deep and lasting influence on Shelley, who first read it while he was at Eton, returned to it again and again in after years, and wrote that he had grown accustomed to consider Godwin 'a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him'.

Godwin's meeting with Mary Wollstonecraft[1] in 1791 excited no immediate admiration for her, but after her near-tragic association with Gilbert Imlay they met again and started the happy relationship which issued in their brief marriage five months before she died in childbirth of their daughter Mary in 1797. The remainder of Godwin's life was clouded by the attacks of those who reprobated his ideas, by the worries of parenthood, and by a possessive and foolish second wife, the widowed mother of Jane Clairmont (who became Byron's mistress and bore his much-publicized daughter Allegra). Embarking at the instance of his wife upon a publishing business in 1805, Godwin became burdened with further anxieties, though the venture remained afloat with the help of friends for twenty years. Godwin's own output of miscellaneous writings in these and the subsequent years was considerable, but of them all only *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) has joined *Political Justice* as a remembered book. *Caleb Williams* is both a propaganda novel and a murder story. The humbly-born hero, caught up in the toils of injustice, suffers persecution and imprisonment, and before the goodness of Caleb's nature leads the murderer to confess, the novel has exposed a number of the major evils that Godwin aimed to eradicate from human society.

As an advocate of the principle of Universal Benevolence, Godwin had little scruple in seeking and accepting the charity

[1] See below, pp. 61–2.

of his friends. There was a curious indirection, however, in his taking money from Shelley by means of cheques bearing another name, and at a time when Shelley and Godwin were estranged by the poet's liaison with Mary Godwin during the two years before their marriage in her father's presence in 1816.

In his later years Godwin was comforted by the friendship of a remarkable group of younger contemporaries, Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt among them. He was liked and admired; Shelley's debt to him was incalculable; but he lacked that compulsion of personal character which has made lesser men than Godwin a living force to distant posterity.

The Enlightenment produced in Germany the first body of modern Romantic literature, based largely upon a new critical approach animated by that readiness of emotional response which is the mainspring of *sensibility*, a keyword of the age. In the political and philosophical literature of France and in the events it helped to promote, the Enlightenment represented a new standard of human relationships in which the bondage and oppression of the majority by an aristocratic minority should cease. The failure of these aspirations to achieve in practice what they promised in theory was a consequence of the excessive emotional optimism which postulated an imaginary creature, the Natural Man, as the archetype of the Perfect Human. In England, as will be seen in later chapters, a humorous appreciation of amiable absurdities in the sensibility craze saved literature from plunging into the lower depths of the emotional morass, though the eighteenth-century nostalgia for medievalism and the fashion for lush melancholy with an occult tinge produced that strange literary fungus, the Gothic Novel. In the English climate, however, the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement were purged of their major illusions and extravagances. In Wordsworth they reached ultimate sanity without more than occasional loss of beauty, and found a middle way between the commonplace and the ecstatic without missing profundity. In *The Ancient Mariner* Coleridge transmuted gothic pinchbeck into the magical gold of great poetry. The lyrical mastery of Shelley and Keats assimilated the material of humanitarianism and romanticism, though each preserved an individual poetic identity. Byron

came closest to being assimilated by the external forces of the age, but his instinct of tragical self-dramatization was held in check and compensated by his unique satirical powers, which outstripped those of Dryden and Pope in passion if not in wit: they scourged with whips, he chastised with scorpions.

CHAPTER II

PRELUDES TO ROMANTICISM

All efforts to demonstrate the superiority of either Classicism or Romanticism are futile, for the law of change operating ceaselessly in human affairs imposes a perpetual oscillation between extremes. From generation to generation, Classicism and Romanticism appear alternately desirable, while each in its turn runs to excess and generates disgust. Within a single lifetime individual taste may swing through the whole arc; within the measureless life of mankind the oscillation establishes an equilibrium between the ultimate stagnation of formal Classicism and the ultimate exhaustion of Romanticism through excess of feeling and sensation. But at this point the metaphor of the pendulum has to be abandoned, for it suggests a uniformity of movement and a precise balance of opposites which is not borne out by historical experience in the alternation of Classicism and Romanticism. Indeed, these convenient critical terms are themselves misleading, in so far as they may suggest an equal weighting of complementaries. In application each carries variable overtones and shifting undercurrents of significance beyond the scope of etymology. *Classical* is defined as 'restrained', 'simple', 'harmonious', 'proportioned', 'finished'; *Romanticism* as 'imaginative', 'visionary', 'remote from experience', 'passionate', 'fantastic', 'dreamy', 'picturesque', 'inclining to grandeur', 'preferring irregular beauty to finish and proportion', 'subordinating form to matter'.

These dictionary definitions perpetuate a fallacy, however. The literature and art of ancient Greece, which are taken as the Classical norm, embody not only 'classical' characteristics but also a number of factors now called 'romantic': imagination, vision, passion, grandeur. Nor in modern Romantic literature and art are simplicity, harmony, proportion, finish, inevitably lacking. In respect of their modern usage it is often appropriate to read *static* for 'Classical' and *dynamic* for 'Romantic'. Again, in relation to certain periods it would be more nearly accurate to substitute *living* for Romantic and *dead* for Classical. It is well to remember also that in the sense in which the word has been

used by most Classicists since the early Renaissance period, the literature of ancient Greece was not 'Classical'. Greek literature was a living literature. Classicism is revivalism: the imposition upon a later age of standards which served the ancients well, but which for moderns may demand the subjection of creative energy to barren theory.

There is nothing in English literature which can be exhibited as a Classical masterpiece. The many attempts from the sixteenth century onward to naturalize the Classical style have failed to produce anything better than lifeless imitations. The mortal error of the Classicists lay in their belief that a living literature could spring not from the *spirit* of ancient literature—the literature of the only true Classical Moment—but from a set of 'classical rules' which were mostly of modern invention or, even when derived genuinely from Greek practice, were peculiar to Greek needs and conditions. That the spirit of ancient Greek literature and the ideals it expresses have irrigated and fertilized the modern mind to its incalculable profit is unquestionable; but it is also unquestionable that most of the profit which English literature owes to the classical tradition has come through Romantic writers.

Simplicity, restraint, harmony, proportion, form, and finish have a place in Romantic literature together with imagination, vision, and feeling. Where and when Romanticism has fallen into disrepute the cause lies in the extravagance and incapacity of undisciplined minor writers who exploit the sentimental, the sensational, the morbid, the occult, the erotic. These aspects of Romanticism appear severally in the works of lesser Elizabethan and later playwrights, in the gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and scattered over minor poetry at irregular intervals from the seventeenth-century Metaphysicals[1] onward. But modern English Romantic literature also embraces the simplicities of Nature in, e.g., Gilbert White's prose and Wordsworth's verse, the lyrical harmony of Shelley, the restraint and form and finish of Keats's odes.

The only immovable barrier between Classicism (i.e. neo-Classicism) and Romanticism is the strict rigidity of the one in

[1] See Vol. II of the present work (cited hereafter as Ward: II), pp. 19, 27 ff.

contrast with the infinite flexibility which permits the other to touch life at all points: to represent its moods in full variety; to depict its colours, suggest its subtleties of perception, delicacies of emotion, tendernesses and cruelties, loves and hates; to plumb its mysteries and explore its unbounded intellectual universe. Because its territory is limitless and can never be finally surveyed and mapped, Romanticism may flounder in shallows and plunge into abysses never approached by Classicism. In seventeenth-century France, Corneille and Racine in tragedy, and Molière in comedy, succeeded in transmuting Classicism through some timely conjuncture of material and individual genius, but theirs remains a lonely achievement. Romantic literature has flourished at its healthiest in Britain, where, lapses apart, there has been a characteristic avoidance of the posturing self-pity of German Romantics, the theatricality of French, and the adolescent confusions and false values of American.

Romanticism, as the word is now commonly used and understood, relates less to the quality in itself than to its modern manifestation in the Romantic Movement (or Romantic Revival) which became a growing force in European literature from about the middle of the eighteenth century, when 'the old narrow intellectual attitude gave place to a wider outlook, which recognized the claims of passion and emotion and the sense of mystery in life, and in which the critical was replaced by the creative spirit, and wit by humour and pathos'.[1] Though this would be challenged by Classicists who deny that their attitude is narrowly intellectual or imperceptive of passion and mystery, it serves well as a summary statement of the Romantic revivalists' own outlook and purposes.

Neither Romanticism nor Classicism is native to English literature, for nothing is native to a race which has inherited its culture piecemeal from abroad. Yet in so far as there is an implanted tendency that can be called *the English spirit* or *the English genius*, its bias has been Romantic from the time of Chaucer, whose poetry has the largeness of vision—emotion, pathos, humour, penetration, tolerance—the freshness of discovery, the delight in living and in the whole endowment of the

[1] *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*: article on 'The Romantic Revival'.

created universe from the daisy upwards, which constitute the morning aspect, the sweetness and light of Romanticism. Its reverse aspect appears in the medieval ballads, where passion, treachery, cruelty, murder, and bloody revenge appear amidst the common stock of human experience. In Malory and other Arthurian works both aspects are displayed through a perplexing union of courtly love and high spiritual aspiration with common lust and brigandage. Spenser, who inherited from Chaucer and from Arthurian sources, passed on something of the spirit of both to later Elizabethans, with whom the preliminary phase of English Romanticism closed.

The eighteenth-century antiquarians and archæologists—recovering the medieval ballads, brooding over Stonehenge and other ancient monuments while they invented imaginary druidical origins, and fabricating 'old' literary documents—became obsessed by the past, but without a controlling historical sense. Yet, though carried away by reckless fantasies and a fancy-dress mentality which demanded a *picturesque* reconstruction of the past, they also had the advantage of being blessedly innocent of the inching pedantry of later researchers. If their slapdash methods and nebulous guesses need to be deplored, some of the indirect consequences must nevertheless be received with gratitude, for without the historically 'false' view that the past was picturesque and mysterious, the best of Coleridge's poems and several of Keats's best could not have been written. The magic of these poems emanated from an illusion; but it could not have emanated at all from a whole library of accurate and objective scholarly monographs.

That the cult of medievalism filled the lumber-room of literature with a clutter of sensational, often silly, spasmodically horrific, and, finally, debased fiction must be acknowledged. It is instructive to note, however, that nearly all of this 'popular' material has passed out of circulation, while Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*, and Keats's *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, which are also a part of the heritage of that cult, have endured.

The Gothic Novel

The word *Gothic* long ago lost the original slur of 'barbarous' and 'uncouth' which belonged to it as a derivative from the

name of the destroying hordes who invaded the Empire in the third and following centuries. Gothic architecture so far belies the name as to have become associated with ideas of extreme delicacy and refinement in design and structure. For eighteenth-century medievalists, however, it was the shadowy and therefore suggestively mysterious nooks and crannies of Gothic monastic buildings and cathedrals that were characteristic and distinctive. Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill and William Beckford at Fonthill sought to reproduce the monastic atmosphere in their mock-gothic mansions, while Walpole and his successors aimed to create a matching atmosphere in their so-called gothic novels.

Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) exploits 'sub-terraneous regions', 'intricate cloisters', rusty grating hinges echoing through a 'long labyrinth of darkness'. Traversing those regions of the castle, Isabella's blood 'curdled', she was filled with 'terror', and 'every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind'. Its deliberate aim of suggesting a state of emotional alarm gave this kind of fiction its other generic title, the Novel of Terror, and its achievements have to be measured according to the degree in which the individual author's works were likely to induce such a state in the susceptible contemporary reader, for none has remained alive in its own right as a novel of incident and character.

The Castle of Otranto was widely read but did not start an immediate fashion. It remained without followers for more than twelve years, until *The Champion of Virtue, a Gothic Story* (1777) by Clara Reeve appeared (renamed *The Old English Baron* in its second edition, 1778). Though it has a medieval setting and possesses a ghost, it is more ladylike and urbane than alarming and horrifying. With only half an eye upon Walpole, her model, Clara Reeve sought to combine with probability and pathos only enough of the marvellous to excite attention. She was not, in fact, a true practitioner of the gothic, though her book sustained the taste for its kind until Mrs. Radcliffe began to publish.

With *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) launched a succession of novels of more merit and stronger influence than the rest of those produced by the gothic school.

She had a genuine feeling for nature, no small skill in creating an extravagant type of character, and more control of the intractable material of horror than any other contemporary writer of such fiction. The Alps fascinated her, as *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) shows, and scenery in its wilder aspects provides an impressive setting for her masterpiece *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), which has the gloomy castle of Udolpho in the Apennines as its chief scene of action, Emily the heroine being held there by the villain Montoni, her aunt's husband. Mrs. Radcliffe's technical superiority lay in her ability to maintain suspense by a procession of scenes, incidents, and descriptions which no doubt carried her early readers thrillingly and tremulously through many hundreds of pages without the wrench of periodic anti-climax, though not without cunningly positioned points of rest for tried nerves.

Left alone in a locked chamber containing an iron chair and instruments of torture, Emily sees

> a dark curtain, which, descending from the ceiling to the floor, was drawn along the whole side of the chamber. Ill as she was, the appearance of this curtain struck her, and she paused to gaze upon it in wonder and apprehension. It seemed to conceal a recess of the chamber; she wished yet dreaded to lift it, and to discover what it veiled; twice she was withheld by a recollection of the terrible spectacle her daring hand had formerly unveiled in an apartment of the castle, till, suddenly conjecturing that it concealed the body of her murdered aunt, she seized it in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside. Beyond appeared a corpse stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face. Emily, bending over the body, gazed for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch. (Ch. XXVI.)

This period fustian, presented with widely varying degrees of literary skill, represents one preliminary phase of the Romantic Revival, and is interwoven with many passages of quite different material which bring *The Mysteries of Udolpho* into distant relationship with the work of the nature poets: e.g.

> The rays of the setting sun now threw a yellow gleam upon the forests of pine and chestnut that swept down the lower region of

> the mountains, and gave resplendent tints to the snowy points above. But soon even this light faded fast, and the scenery assumed a more tremendous appearance, invested with the obscurity of twilight. Where the torrent had been seen, it was now only heard; where the wild cliffs had displayed every variety of form and attitude a dark mass of mountains now alone appeared; and the vale, which far, far below had opened its dreadful chasm, the eye could no longer fathom. A melancholy gleam still lingered on the summits of the highest Alps, overlooking the deep repose of evening, and seeming to make the stillness of the hour more awful. (Ch. L.)

And in the following paragraph of the same chapter:

> Then fell the silent dews; and every wild flower and aromatic plant that bloomed along the cliffs, breathed forth its sweetness; then, too, when the mountain-bee had crept into its blossomed bed, and the hum of every little insect that had floated gaily in the sunbeam was hushed, the sound of many streams, not heard till now, murmured at a distance.

Although there is some mannered language and straining after the picturesque in these passages—resplendent tints . . . the obscurity of twilight . . . the torrent . . . the wild cliffs . . . dreadful chasm . . . melancholy gleam . . . the stillness of the hour more awful . . . crept into its blossomed bed—there is, more importantly, a good deal of direct observation and genuine appreciation of natural beauty. In that respect Mrs. Radcliffe's was a forward-looking talent. Two generations later, in a changed intellectual and emotional atmosphere, she might have appeared a not unworthy contemporary of the Brontës and other women novelists of genius. As it was, her novels have no interior life, and her importance in English literature is as one of the pioneers of Romanticism who stimulated Shelley's love of nature and set a pattern for certain of Byron's characters.

In an illuminating essay[1] on gothic fiction, Michael Sadleir calls Ann Radcliffe 'the most influential novelist of the late eighteenth century' and adds that she 'was only very incidentally a writer of absurdities'. There was a calamitous falling

[1] '"All Horrid": Jane Austen and the Gothic Romance' in *Things Past* (Constable, London, 1944).

away from her standards by the later novelists of the school, and the Novel of Terror perished in the welter of occultism, eroticism, and sadism of *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775–1818), who imported the worst excesses of German Romanticism.

On the fringe of gothic fiction stands *Vathek*, a remarkable short 'oriental' novel written in French by William Beckford (1759–1844) and published in an English version in 1786; while as a pendant to the whole movement and as a precursor—though a shapeless one—of later psychological fiction, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), by Charles Maturin (1782–1824), is of some importance, and not without curious interest for present-day readers with patience to pick their way through a straggling jungle of incidents and episodes.

Cowper and Crabbe

Among the most powerful of the forces which broke up eighteenth-century formalism was the religious movement led, though not in unison, by John Wesley and George Whitefield. The Evangelical Revival began within the ranks of the Established Church and was intended by Wesley to breathe new spiritual life into the lax clergy. The Revival ultimately gave birth to a new denomination, however—'the people called Methodists'. Methodism was salvationist—Wesley's own sudden conversion being a key instance of redemption by grace and faith—and, with reservations, it was also humanitarian. It must be considered a phase of the Enlightenment in its care for the individual soul and in its organized endeavours to promote education and welfare work among the poor. Yet its humanitarianism was combined with a ruthless disciplinarianism, for Wesley's educational programme in *A Plain Account of the People called Methodists*[1] (1749) imposed ten hours' schooling daily upon children, beginning at 6 a.m., forbade them to speak in school except to the masters, and ruled that they were to have no play-days. Nevertheless, Wesley and the Methodists avoided those extremes of religious fervour which the laodicean clergy derided with the name *Enthusiasm*, and which was ill-fitted to the needs of unstable or delicately adjusted minds.

William Cowper (1731–1800), son of the incumbent of Great

[1] Reprinted in *A Miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets*: see above, p. 7*n*.

Berkhampstead church in Hertfordshire, was by temperament abnormally sensitive and suffered much in boyhood from bullying companions. After leaving Westminster School he went into a solicitor's office as an articled clerk and was called to the Bar when he was twenty-three. Persistent melancholia and self-distrust led to insanity and attempted suicide when he contemplated his duties on appointment (1763) as a clerk in the House of Lords. After recovering, Cowper lived in seclusion, first (1765–7) at Huntingdon as a lodger with Morley Unwin and his wife; and from 1767, after Unwin's death, at Olney in Buckinghamshire. Mrs. Unwin remained with him as his companion until her death in 1794. His intention of marrying her was frustrated by another period of mental derangement beginning in 1773 and lasting some two or three years. He was afflicted again in 1787 and for the remainder of his life was subject to intermittent insanity.

Early in the Olney period Cowper came under the influence of John Newton (1725–1807) who, after nearly twenty years of seafaring, gave himself to religion and, as a disciple of George Whitefield, embraced Evangelicalism in its most austere form. He became curate of Olney, and the extreme joylessness of Newton's religion aggravated Cowper's mental unsettlement; yet their association produced some of the finest English hymns. Both contributed to *Olney Hymns* (1779), Cowper's sixty-seven including 'Oh! for a closer walk with God', 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform', and 'Hark, my soul! it is the Lord'. Cowper was a simple creature whose sweetness and absence of guile are shown in his many admirable letters, which may outlast his secular poems.

Apart from the hymns, Cowper's remembered poetry comprises a few short pieces and the unique ballad 'The Diverting History of John Gilpin'. The most moving of his poems, 'To Mary', was addressed to Mrs. Unwin when she was near her death, twenty years after the attack of insanity which prevented his marrying her:

> Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
> Are still more lovely in my sight
> Than golden beams of orient light,
> My Mary!
>
> . . . . . .

THE DIVERTING HISTORY OF

JOHN GILPIN!

Shewing how he went farther than he intended, & came safe home again.

JOHN GILPIN was a citizen
Of credit and renown,
A train band captain eke was he
Of famous London town.

John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear
Though wedded we have been
These twice ten tedious years, yet we
No holiday have seen.

To-morrow is our wedding day,
And we will then repair
Unto the bell at Edmonton
All in a chaise and pair.

My sister, and my sister's child,
Myself, and children three,
Will fill the chaise; so you must ride
On horseback after we.

He soon replied, I do admire
Of woman-kind but one,
And you are she my dearest dear,
Therefore it shall be done.

I am a linen draper bold,
As all the world doth know,
And my good friend, the calender,
Will lend his horse to go.

Quoth Mrs Gilpin, that's well said,
And for that wine is dear,
We will be furnished with our own,
Which is both bright and clear.

John Gilpin kiss'd his loving wife;
O'erjoyed he was to find,
That, though on pleasure she was bent
She had a frugal mind.

The morning came the chaise was
brought,
But yet was not allow'd
To drive up to the door, lest all
Should say that she was proud.

So three doors off the chaise was stay'd
Where they did all get in;
Six precious souls, and all agog
To dash through thick and thin.

Smack went the whip, round went the
wheels,
Were never folks so glad,
The stones did rattle underneath,
As if Cheapside were mad.

John Gilpin at his horse's side,
Seiz'd fast the flowing mane,
And up he got, in haste to ride,
But soon came down again.

For saddle-tree scarce reach'd had he
His journey to begin,
When turning round his head, he saw
Three customers come in.

So down he came, for loss of time,
Although it grev'd him sore;
Yet loss of pence, full well he knew,
Would trouble him much more.

'Twas long before the customers
Were suited to their mind,
When Betty screaming came down
stairs

'The wine is left behind!
Good lack! quoth he—yet bring it me
My leathern belt likewise,
In which I bear my trusty sword,
When I do exercise.

Now mistress Gilpin (careful soul!)
Had two stone bottles found,
To hold the liquor that she lov'd,
And keep it safe and sound.

Each bottle had a curling ear,
Through which the belt he drew,
And hung a bottle on each side,
To make his balance true.

Then over all, that he might be,
Equip'd from top to toe,
His long red cloak, well brush'd and
neat,
He manfully did throw.

Now see him mounted once again,
Upon his nimble steed,
Full slowly pacing o'er the stones,
With caution and good heed.

But finding soon a smoother road
Beneath his well-shod feet,
The snorting beast began to trot,
Which gall'd him in his seat.

So, fair and softly John, he cried
But John he cried in vain;
That trot became a gallop soon,
In spite of curb and rein.

So stooping down as needs he must,
Who cannot sit upright;
He grasp'd the mane with both his hands
And eke with all his might.

His horse, who never to that sort,
Had handled been before,
What thing upon his back had got
Did wonder more and more.

Away went Gilpin, neck or nought;
Away went hat and wig;
He little dreamt, when he set out,
Of running such a rig.

The wind did blow, the cloak did fly,
Like streamer long and gay,
Till, loop and button failing both,
At last it flew away.

Then might all people well discern
The bottles he had slung,
A bottle swinging at each side,
As hath been said or sung.

The dogs, did bark, the children
screamd
Up flew the windows all;
And every soul cried out, Well done!
As loud as he could bawl.

Away went Gilpin—who but he?
His fame soon spread around,
He carries weight! he rides a race!
'Tis for a thousand pound!

And still, as he drew near,
'Twas wonderful to view,
How in a trice the turnpike men
Their gates wide open threw.

And now as he went bowing down
His reeking head full low,
The bottles twain behind his back
Were shatter'd at a blow

Down ran the wine into the road,
Most piteous to be seen,
Which made his horse's flanks to smoke
As they had basted been.

But still he seem'd to carry weight
With leathern girdle brac'd,
For all might see the bottle-necks
Still dangling at his waist.

Thus all through merry Islington,
These gambols he did play,
Until he came unto the Wash,
Of Edmonton so gay,

And there he threw the wash about
On both sides of the way,
Just like unto a trundling mop,
Or a wild goose at play.

At Edmonton his loving wife,
From the balcony espied,
Her tender husband, wondering much
To see how he did ride.

Stop, stop, John Gilpin, here's the
house,
They all at once did cry!
The dinner waits, and we are tir'd;
Said Gilpin so am I!

But yet his horse was not a whit
Inclin'd to tarry there,
For why?—his owner had a house
Full nine miles off, at Ware.

So like an arrow swift he flew,
Shot by an archer strong,
So did he fly—which brings me to
The middle of my song.

Away went Gilpin out of breath,
And sore against his will,
Till at his friend the calender's
His horse at last stood still.

The calender, amaz'd to see
His neighbour in such trim,
Laid down his pipe, flew to the gate,
And thus accosted him.

What news? what news? your tidings
tell,
Tell me you must and shall—
Say why bareheaded you are come,
Or why you come at all?

Now Gilpin had a pleasant wit,
And lov'd a merry joke;
And thus unto the calender
In merry guise he spoke.

I came because your horse would
come
And, if I well forebode,
My hat and wig will soon be here,
They are upon the road.

The calender right glad to find,
His friend in merry pin,
Return'd him not a single word,
But to the house went in.

Whence straight he came with hat &
wig,
A wig that flow'd behind,
A hat not much the worse for wear,
Each comely in its kind.

He held them up, and in his turn
Thus shew'd his ready wit—
My head is twice as big as yours
They therefore needs must fit,

But let me scrape the dirt away
That hangs upon your face,
And stay and eat a bit or two
Before you take your race.

So he in a hungry case,
Said John, it is my wedding-day,
And all the world would stare,
If wife should dine at Edmonton,
And I should dine at Ware,

So, turning to his horse, he said,
I am in haste to dine;
'Twas for your pleasure you came here
You shall go back for mine,

Away went Gilpin, and away
Went Gilpin's head and wig—
He lost them sooner than at first,
For why?—they were too big.

Now mistress Gilpin, when she saw,
Her husband posting down,
Into the country far away,
She pull'd out half a crown;

And thus unto the youth she said,
That drove them to the Bell,
This shall be yours when you bring
back
My husband safe and well.

The youth did ride, and soon did meet
John coming back amain
Whom in a trice he tried to stop,
By catching at his rein;

But not performing what he meant,
And gladly would have done,
The frighted steed he frighted more,
And made him faster run,

Ah! bootless speed, to hasten hence,
For whom he paid full dear,
For while he spake, a braying ass
Did sing most loud and clear;

Whereat his horse did snort, as he
Had heard a lion roar,
And gallop'd off with all his might
As he had done before,

Away went Gilpin, and away
Went post boy at his heels;
The post-boy's horse right glad to
miss
The lumb'ring of the wheels,

His countenance upon the road,
Thus seeing Gilpin fly,
With post-boy scamp'ring in his rear,
They rais'd the hue and cry—
Stop thief! stop thief!—a highway-
man!

Not one of them was mute,
And all and each that pass'd that way
Did join in the pursuit,

And now the turnpike gates again
Flew open in short space
The toll-men thinking as before,
That Gilpin rode a race.

And so he did, and won it too,
For he got first to town,
Nor stopp'd till where he had got up,
He did again get down.

Now let us sing, long live the King,
And Gilpin long live he;
And when he next doth ride abroad,
May I be there to see!

Partakers of thy sad decline,
Thy hands their little force resign;
Yet, gently prest, press gently mine,
My Mary!

Unclouded by sophistication, Cowper was uniquely fitted to express the tenderest emotions without dropping into sentimentality or bathos. Inborn grace gave his writings the innocent humanity which Wordsworth sought with conscious application but only spasmodic success.

Of Cowper's longer poems, only *The Task* (1785) is now read, mainly for a few passages of seasonal nature poetry and for the lines beginning 'England, with all thy faults I love thee still' (Book II). Little that he wrote is more characteristic or more closely representative of his position as a forerunner of those Romantic poets who looked for inspiration in the lives of the humble and simple than this passage from 'Truth' (in *Poems*, 1782)

Yon cottager who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbin all her little store,
Content though mean, and cheerful, if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding, and no wit;
Receives no praise, but (though her lot be such,
Toilsome and indigent) she renders much;
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true,
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes,
Her title to a treasure in the skies.

A much less idyllic impression of rural life appears in the works of George Crabbe (1754–1832). He was born at Aldeburgh in Suffolk, had little regular education, and did menial work before becoming apprenticed to medicine and at length qualifying as a doctor. A period in London, during which he was aided by Burke, was followed by a change of profession. He entered the Church and became curate of Aldeburgh in 1781. Later he held benefices elsewhere, finally as rector of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, from 1814. An accomplished narrative poet and a realist, in *The Village* (1783), *The Parish Register*

(1807), and *The Borough* (1810) he depicted the lives of the poor with sympathy, but grimly, and without mitigating the brutality of the times. His work has now more sociological and historical than poetic interest, and attention was only mildly recalled to *The Borough* by Benjamin Britten's opera on one of its episodes, *Peter Grimes* (1944), based on the story in Letter XXII of Crabbe's poem.

Blake

From being for several decades after his death one of the most entirely neglected of English artists and poets,[1] William Blake (1757–1827) has in the present century not only been accorded his rightful high rank in graphic and poetic art but has also provided inexhaustible material for an intellectualist cult centred upon the least comprehensible part of his writings, the so-called Prophetic Books. Whatever spiritual and political significance these may have when their mysticism is apprehended and their private symbolism and mythology unravelled, by normal standards of criticism they can only be regarded as an instance of monumental failure in communication. Since the Prophetic Books are an insurmountable stumbling block to most readers,[2] it is fortunate that enjoyment and appreciation of Blake's work as poet and artist do not depend wholly or even chiefly upon understanding of Blake the prophet. This is heresy to initiates who consider that in Blake the trinity of poet, artist, and prophet is one and indivisible. But enlightenment does not come most readily by labour, and the Prophetic Books might meanwhile be put aside; or if they are read let them be read at first not for the elucidation of riddles—

> . . . these the Labours of the Sons of Los in Allamanda
> And in the City of Golgonooza & in Luban & around
> The Lake of Udan-Adan in the Forests of Entuthon Benython.[3]

[1] The 'rediscovery' of Blake dates from the publication of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* in 1863. This was followed by Swinburne's essay on him (1868), and by an edition of his writings edited by E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (1893). Yeats was the most influential of Blake's later disciples and his own poetry owed much to Blake.

[2] A summary attempt at interpretation can be found in *William Blake*, by H. M. Margoliouth (Home University Library, 1951), and a more ambitious endeavour in *Fearful Symmetry*, by Northrop Frye (Princeton University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1947).

[3] *Milton* (1804–8), Book I: 28.

—but for the poetry of such passages as

She went up to her flocks & turned oft to see her shining house.
She stop'd to drink of the clear spring & eat the grapes & apples.
She bore the fruits in her lap; she gather'd flowers for her bosom.
She called to her flocks, saying, 'Follow me, O my flocks!'
They follow'd her to the silent valley beneath the spreading trees.
And on the river's margin she ungirded her golden girdle;
She stood in the river & view'd herself within the wat'ry glass,
And her bright hair was wet with the waters: she rose up from the river,
And as she rose her eyes were open'd to the world of waters: . . .[1]

One of the best-known of Blake's lyrics, that called 'Jerusalem' ('And did those feet in ancient time Walk upon England's mountains green?'), comes as a footnote to the prose Preface of *Milton*, and a longer variant is embedded in the prophetic book named *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804–20):

The fields from Islington to Marybone,
To Primrose Hill and Saint John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.

Her Little-ones ran on the fields,
The Lamb of God among them seen,
And fair Jerusalem his Bride,
Among the little meadows green.

In these as well as in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* simplicity and profundity are unified, beyond the sphere of intellect but not beyond the sphere where mysticism and the human imagination have contact.

Paradoxical though it may seem, the contradictory features in Blake's poetry considered as a whole—the difficulty and obscurity as well as the simplicity—were the product of his mystical clarity of vision, which made the whole universe lucid to him. It is certain that he did not cultivate obscurity as a mannerism or as an esoteric veil. His Zoas—Urizen, Los, Luvah, and Tharmas and the rest of his many symbolic personages—were as real and familiar to his inward sight as are Tom, Dick,

[1] *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1795–1804): Night the Ninth.

and Harry to normal eyes. He ends the Preface to *Milton* with a line from the Old Testament (*Numbers* xi, 29): 'Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets', but Blake tended to lose sight of the fact that they are not. We admire and delight in and quote as though we comprehended in daily experience the preamble to his 'Auguries of Innocence' (*c.* 1803):

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour

yet in truth this is but one of the many little poems by Blake which, by verbal simplicity and poetic rhythm, cajole the reader into giving imaginative body to a metaphysical concept. In these, Blake performs with success the act of communication which he fails to perform in the Prophetic Books. Such failure is unquestionably a fault in poetry, however irrelevant it may be in prophecy, where riddling words and dark sayings are, traditionally, the major factor in a prophet's equipment. The visionary is neither a logician nor a precisian, and Blake was pre-eminently a visionary. Though in this he was not peculiar among poets, no other English poet has shared Blake's faculty of visual (and at times aural) contact with the spiritual universe. As a young child he *saw* angels; on his death-bed he *saw* and *heard* the wonders of heaven. This gift of pure naked vision is the source of the uniqueness of Blake's lyrics. In them the vision is transmitted in its purity. In the Prophetic Books, on the other hand, the vision is contaminated by externally acquired ideas and knowledge of events—by the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme, and by the current political upheavals in Europe and America. 'In his earlier work Blake is satisfied with natural symbols, with nature as symbol; in his later work . . . the Prophetic Books . . . his meaning is no longer apparent in the ordinary meaning of the words he uses; we have to read him with a key, and the key is not always in our hands; he forgets that he is talking to men on the earth in some language which he has learnt in heavenly places.'[1] While this comment is illuminating in part, it misses a most significant point. Blake did not so much forget that he was

[1] Arthur Symons: *William Blake* (Constable, London, 1907).

talking to men in a heavenly language as lose his power of speaking that language: the curse of Babel entered into him under the pressure of earthly experience and events. Though, under this pressure, symbols multiplied and proliferated and fragmented in his mind without impoverishing his own interior visionary capacity and inward clarity, they brought their own confusion of tongues, which Blake failed to synthetize into a comprehensible poetic language.

No family could easily have adjusted itself to the coming of so unusual a child. His father was a hosier and haberdasher in Broad Street, Golden Square, London, and there William Blake was born on 28 November 1757, the second child in a family of four sons and a daughter. Almost from infancy Blake was beset by visions: when he was four, he spoke of seeing God looking in at him through the window; and at the age of about eight he declared that he saw 'a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars'. It is not surprising that these supernatural claims were treated in his home as childish aberrations calling for punishment, but such visions were recurrent throughout his life. If they originated only in imagination and were not, in truth, evidence of Blake's power of entrance into normally unknown modes of being, at least his imagination was so acute and creative that he visualized and objectified what he 'imagined': for him the spiritual took on Appearance to embody its Reality.

He had no ordinary schooling, and, after some education under a drawing-master, he went as apprentice to a well-known engraver, James Basire, and based his technical style on prints of Raphael and others, and on drawings from casts of antique sculptures and of the effigies in Westminster Abbey. While in his later original drawings and paintings there is a wholly personal rhythm of design and a uniquely Blakean metaphysical presentation of forms, there is invariably also a basic traditionalism and sculpturesque classicism derived from his early training. That he was trained as a pictorial artist is a fact of central importance in Blake's poetry. He was neither a draughtsman and painter who also wrote poetry, nor a poet who also drew and painted: he was essentially an artist-poet, single and inseparable. The difficulty of the Prophetic Books is not removed by the illustrations; but in so far as they may be

susceptible to interpretation in any other form of words than Blake's own, no valid interpretation could be given from a printed text alone, for printers' type was not Blake's medium. Indeed, it is contrary to his intention and practice that any of the poems should be divorced from his own visual embellishment of them. Two works were put into type—the early *Poetical Sketches* and a fragment of *The French Revolution*—but neither was published.

Since the physical means chosen by Blake for the public presentation of his writings is integral to his whole life-work, the steps towards that means have a corresponding importance. His apprenticeship to Basire, which began in 1772 when he was a little under fifteen and lasted seven years, was followed by study at the Royal Academy Schools, where he resisted attempts to bring him into line with academic standards. He married Catherine Boucher in 1782 and found in her a devoted wife and helper through the many lean times that were to follow. In 1784 he opened a print shop in partnership with James Parker (one of his associates at Basire's) and there he engraved from his own and others' pictures during the next three years. By that time, 1787, Blake had been in the engraving business for fifteen years in all and had been writing verse intermittently. When in 1789 he brought out his first (published) book of poems, *Songs of Innocence*, he adopted a technique of his own invention which he called *Illuminated Printing* and used thenceforth for all his published poetry.

Illuminated Printing was achieved by writing and drawing in reverse on a metal plate, using an acid-proof ink. When acid was then applied to the surface of the plate, the portions not written or drawn upon were eaten away and the words and designs remained in relief. A plate was prepared in this way for each page, the pages were printed from the plates in a single colour and assembled in book form, each copy being completed by hand-colouring of the designs. *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* (which followed in 1794) were miniature books, with pages measuring only $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches high by 3 inches wide. The relative proportions of picture and text were determined by the length of each particular poem and the width of its lines. The 'Introduction' to *Songs of Innocence*, with twenty lines, permits only narrow border designs on left and right, while the next

II. A page from *Europe* by William Blake

page with the opening ten lines of 'Spring' (all but one line consisting of no more than three words) has a $1\frac{3}{4}$-inch-deep picture heading, and trailing leaf designs and minute angels to fill the remaining spaces. The process combined something of the effect of engraving and etching—though neither graving tool nor etching needle was used—while the finished coloured pages looked back to medieval miniature painting and illumination. From first to last, from the writing of the poem to the completion of the book, everything except the making of paper, acid, and pigments was Blake's own work, with the occasional help of his wife in colouring. In a Prospectus of Publications (etched and issued in 1793) the price of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, each 'with 25 designs', is given as 5s. a copy. A footnote to the Prospectus adds that 'The Illuminated Books are Printed . . . on the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured. No Subscriptions for the numerous great works now in hand are asked, for none are wanted; but the Author will produce his works, and offer them to sale at a fair price.'

The five years separating *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were crucial, and in a sense fatal, in Blake's life. With the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 he, like Wordsworth and other Englishmen, caught the revolutionary fervour, and in the same year he joined the Swedenborgians,[1] whose apocalyptic religious doctrines are rooted in the New Testament *Revelation of St. John the Divine*. As with all ideas that he made contact with, Blake turned Swedenborgianism inside out, approving this and emphatically rejecting that. It is at once a measure of the liberality of his genius and of the instability of his metaphysic that he is capable of being, through his work, all things to all men. In religion and in politics, enthusiasts of many differing and some opposed beliefs and opinions discover in Blake an apostle or a fellow-believer. Christians claim him as a Christian, but could equally well denounce him as anti-Christian. He had the multipolar magnitude of vision which

[1] Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), the son of a Swedish bishop, was already eminent as engineer, mathematician, physiologist, and philosopher, before he began to exercise an international and still-enduring influence through his theological works, chiefly *Heaven and Hell*, *Divine Love and Wisdom* and *True Christian Religion*. The Swedenborgians in London formed themselves into the New Church in 1788.

releases genius from the confinements of sectarian dogma, but he failed to bring into a single focus those perceptions of the identity of opposites adumbrated in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*c.* 1793), which is in part a critical satire on Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*. Blake's prose aphorisms and 'proverbs' in this work can be cited severally as supporting a variety of diverse opinions. Christians might find comfort among the ambiguities of the section headed 'The Voice of the Devil', but they could only experience baffling perplexity among the contrarities of the 'Proverbs of Hell', which include epigrams often quoted as statements of Blake's own principles, though with hardly more reason than if Iago were held to be Shakespeare's mouthpiece.

There is little need to enlarge upon the literary ancestry of Blake's poetry, since its individuality quickly effaced the signs of influence from Ossian, Chatterton, and others. In the *Poetical Sketches* (printed 1783), 'Fair Elenor' is reminiscent of the medieval ballads; 'An Imitation of Spenser' uses the nine-line stanza, though with only passing attention to Spenser's use; 'Blind-Man's Buff', beginning

> When silver Snow decks Susan's cloaths,
> And jewel hangs at th' shepherd's nose,

suggests a parody of the song at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, even if the suggestion cannot be pursued far; while several of the lyrics (e.g. 'How sweet I roam'd from field to field', 'My silks and fine array', and others) have an Elizabethan ring.

Whatever prominence the modern preoccupation with symbolism has given to the Prophetic Books, Blake's place in English poetry depends upon the loveliness and the human compassion of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, where secondary —or even primary—symbolic intention does not obfuscate the reader's appreciation nor his comprehension:

> And I made a rural pen,
> And I stain'd the water clear,
> And I wrote my happy songs
> Every child may hear.

Symbolism is a good servant but a tyrannical master in poetry. In Blake's earlier books symbolism kept its due place, so that

although 'The Little Girl Lost' (in *Songs of Innocence*) starts, ominously,

> In futurity
> I prophetic see

and brings in the greater beasts with a more-than-nominal significance, the poem preserves its poetic character and identity: the lion and the leopards and the tigers do not become ravening esoteric monsters in whose bowels poetry disintegrates.

Blake was in the deepest sense a happy man whose own nature speaks in 'Infant Joy':

> 'I happy am,
> 'Joy is my name.'

'The Nurse's Song' is his own song:

> When the voices of children are heard on the green
> And laughing is heard on the hill,
> My heart is at rest within my breast
> And everything else is still.

When the scene darkens in *Songs of Experience* the poet in Blake remains ascendant, even though

> Earth raised up her head
> From the darkness dread & drear,
> Her light fled,
> Stony dread!
> And her locks cover'd with grey despair

and even when 'The Nurse's Song' is re-sung on another note:

> When the voices of children are heard on the green
> And whisp'rings are in the dale,
> The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
> My face turns green and pale.

Though there is nothing in all poetry more menacing nor yet more profound than 'The Tyger', there is also, paradoxically, nothing simpler, and certainly nothing lovelier:

> What the hammer? what the chain?
> In what furnace was thy brain?
> What the anvil? what dread grasp
> Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Blake's capacity for friendship was a dominant factor in his life, and a leading principle of his ideal of friendship may have been expressed in the opening lines of 'A Poison Tree' (*Songs of Experience*):

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

—though he found it hard to bear Thomas Stothard's theft of his design for an engraving of the Canterbury Pilgrims. Nor could he be on comfortable terms with his patron and erstwhile friend William Hayley, after a three-years' uneasy stay (1800–03) in Hayley's house at Felpham in Sussex, where he was constantly irritated by attempts to arrange his life.

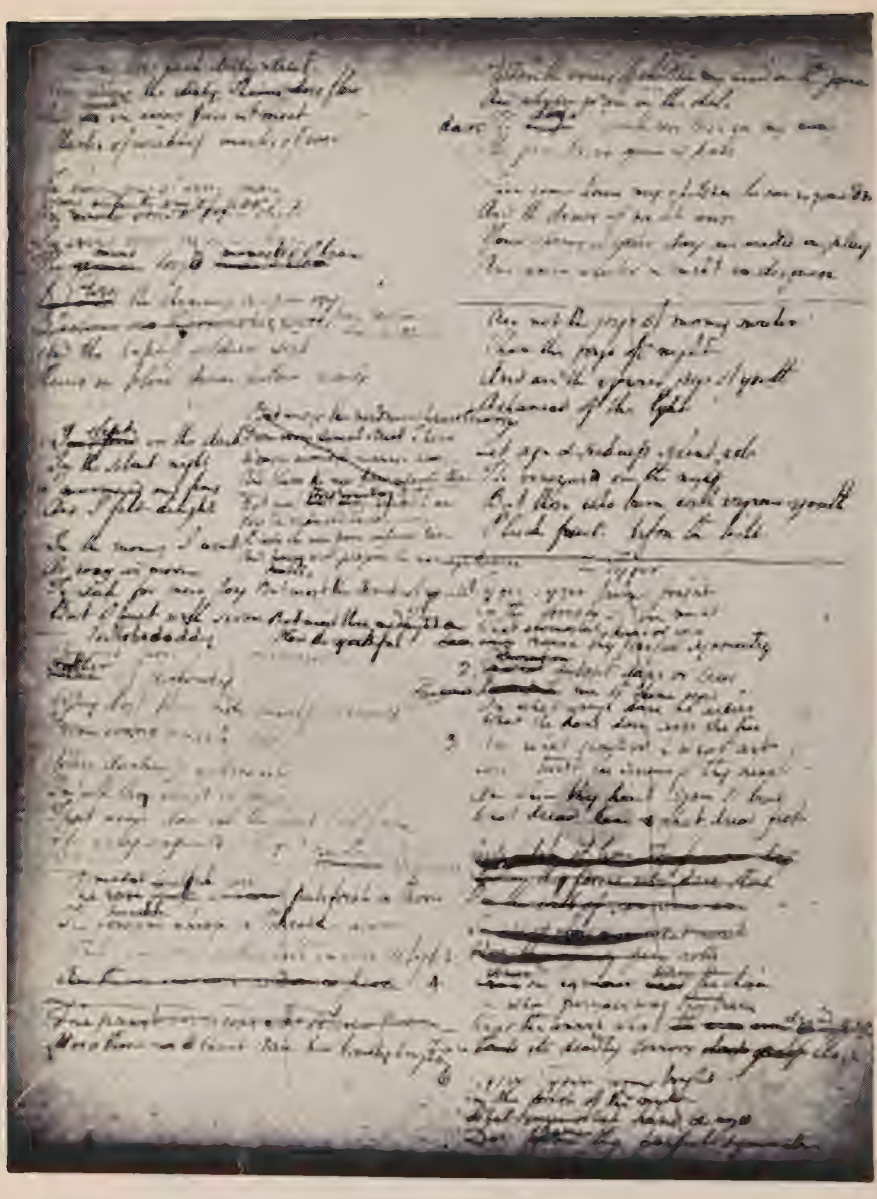
The ten years from 1793, when the Blakes moved to Lambeth —where the bulk of his work was done—until the time they returned from Felpham were the least straitened in their experience. After 1803 there were long stretches of poverty. Beginning in 1818, when a group of younger artists befriended him and brought him work, a happier phase began. John Linnell, himself a notable painter, provided warm hospitality at Hampstead, and it was largely through his encouragement that Blake's masterly designs for the Book of Job were carried out. He and a greater artist, Samuel Palmer, were the central figures among those who made Blake's last home in Fountain Court, Strand, a place of pilgrimage. There he died on 12 August 1827, slipping peacefully out of his body. 'Just before he died his countenance became fair—his eyes brightened and he burst out singing of the things he saw in heaven.'

So rarely individual a poet-artist as Blake cannot be brought within the orbit of any movement. Nevertheless the whole cast of his mind and spirit marks off his work from the formalism of the eighteenth-century classicists, and indeed shatters it. He

2. Fonthill
from the north-west

NEW MORALITY;— or The promised Installment of the New Piece of the PHILANTHROPISTS, and the Homage of Leviathan and his Suite.—
The Sect of MARAT, MIRABEAU, VOLTAIRE,
The holy Hunch back in thy Dome, St. PAUL, —
Wave their Red Caps, and hymn this jocund strain:
Fresh from the Shores of subjugated Nile.
The genuine Theo philanthropic Sect. —

3. A satirical print by Gillray



4. A page from the *Rossetti Manuscript* of William Blake

5. A Blake illustration for *Original Stories* by Mary Wollstonecraft

6. Illustration from Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*

7. Illustration from Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope*

8. Frontispiece to *Father and Daughter* by Amelia Opie

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THE
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9. Title-page of *Tom White The Postilion* by Hannah More

10. Robert Burns by Nasmyth

11. George Crabbe by Pickersgill

had the temper of a rebel angel with an innate compulsion to challenge and defy authority, and it was perhaps inevitable that he should align himself with those who greeted the French Revolution as the beginning of a golden age of liberty, brotherhood, and social justice. While revolutionary political ideas and ideals were a fertilizing influence to Wordsworth temporarily and to Byron and Shelley more lastingly, and became an accepted element in the outlook and work of the Romantics as a group, the incursion of human politics did little but befog the poetry of Blake. But the visionary and humanitarian and lyrical genius of Romanticism is pervasive and insistent in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, and if no Romantic Revival had then been on the way to distract attention from him, Blake would surely have been recognized sooner than he was as a leader into new ways.

White's 'Selborne'

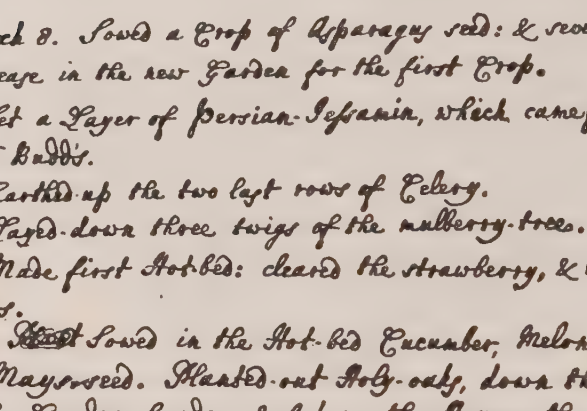
The Rev. Gilbert White (1720–93) was born, and lived and died, in the small Hampshire village of Selborne, where he served as curate for most of his life after graduating at Oxford. His utterly devoted love of Selborne made him decline preferment to other and financially more attractive livings, and he spent his days and years observing the birds and other creatures of the country round about, recording particulars of its geological formations, its weather, cottages, inhabitants, industries, sports, and everything else that was Selborne's.

White was a prose Wordsworth. He cut no figure outside Selborne and was in no literary current, but his quiet passion for Nature and his humane interest in man, bird, and beast are like, in impulse, to the spirit which produced the abundant harvest of nature poetry during the course of the Romantic movement. In Gilbert White's writings there is an entire absence of the eighteenth-century hankering after 'Nature to advantage dressed'; he saw Nature plain, however lovingly, and his book is a prospectus rather than a rhapsody: the work of a scientist more than of a poet. Yet through some miracle of single-heartedness and unblemished simplicity *Selborne* has often the moving quality of poetry.

The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne in a Series of Letters addressed to Thomas Pennant, Esq. and the Hon. Daines

Barrington was published in 1789, as a narrative based upon long correspondence with White's two friends. It had the aim, White wrote in the prefatory Advertisement, of

> laying before the public his idea of *parochial history*, which, he thinks, ought to consist of natural productions and occurrences



3 (2)

March 8. Sowed a Crop of Asparagus seed: & seven rows of pease in the new Garden for the first Crop.

9. Set a Layer of Persian-Jessamin, which came from Mr Budds.

15. Earthed up the two last rows of Celery.

Do. Layed down three twigs of the mulberry-tree.

21. Made first Hot-bed: cleared the strawberry, & raspberry beds.

22. Sowed in the Hot-bed Cucumber, Melon, Sypahy, & Mayes-seed. Planted out Holy-oaks, down the field, & in the Garden-border, & before the House: the seed from the Grange. Sowed a Crop of Carrots, Parsneps, Beets, Radishes, Lettuce, Leeks, Onions; a small crop of Salsafy; red Cabbage-seed, Dutch parsley, & Chardoon. There has been a Glut of wet for five weeks, & the Ground was rather too moist; but worked pretty well.

23. In the Hot-bed, two rows of African, & French Marigold seed.

27. Planted four rows of Winsor-beans in the field-Garden in ground just turned in from Grass.

April 1. Sowed in the field-garden four rows of marrow-fat pease.

A page from Gilbert White's *The Garden-Kalender*

> as well as antiquities. . . . If the writer should at all appear to have induced any of his readers to pay a more ready attention to the wonders of the Creation, too frequently overlooked as common

> occurrences; . . . or if he shall have thrown some small light upon ancient customs and manners, and especially upon those that were monastic; his purpose will be fully answered. But if he should not have been successful in any of these his intentions, yet there remains this consolation behind—that these his pursuits, by keeping the body and mind employed, have, under Providence, contributed to much health and cheerfulness of spirits, even to old age: . . .

Selborne has no purple passages and, being no contriver of epigrams, White does not make any showing in dictionaries of quotations. His book is a tapestry of Nature; a piece cut from it is only a piece without suggestion of the finished design. But to read in White's prose of frosts, of an autumn shower of gossamer, of echoes, of the downs, of crocuses in the spring, of gypsies, of the 'mute month' of August when few birds sing, is to be made aware of innumerable subjects ready to be touched into poetry; and if Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy' is read beside Letter XXVII of *Selborne* it is not White who suffers by the comparison.

CHAPTER III

THE SCOTTISH REVIVAL

Between the fifteenth-sixteenth century Scottish Chaucerians[1] and Robert Fergusson (1750–74) the written poetry by Scottish authors had very few national characteristics either in language or in subject matter. English superseded Scots as the literary language of most writers born north of the border, and there is little or nothing to distinguish the work of such poets as William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585–1649) and James Thomson (1700–48)[2] from their English contemporaries. The name Scottish Chaucerians, given to James I of Scotland, Robert Henryson, Gavin Douglas, and William Dunbar, is at least partially misleading, for the indebtedness of the last three to Chaucer in respect of verse measures and themes was secondary to their native temper and outlook and the robust quality of their native dialect. These national characteristics reappeared only sporadically—as in the border ballads and such other anonymous poems as 'The Gaberlunzie Man' and 'Waly Waly', and in a few pieces by Lady Grisel Baillie (1665–1746)[3] —until Allan Ramsay (1686–1758)[4] came as the precursor of a revival which culminated in the poetry of Fergusson and Burns, and in those novels by Scott which grew from the history, legends, and language of his own country.

Forerunners of Burns

Among the many writers named by Burns in a letter to Dr. John Moore (2 August 1787) as sources from which his knowledge of literature was gathered, Allan Ramsay receives passing mention, but in a later part of the letter he says: 'meeting with Fergusson's Scotch poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour'. Though Burns might on

[1] See Ward: I, pp. 39–42.
[2] See Ward: II, pp. 41, 209 ff.
[3] See *A Book of Scottish Verse*, edited by R. L. Mackie (The World's Classics, 1934).
[4] See Ward: II, pp. 158–9.

occasion sign himself 'A Peasant', he was uncommonly well read and was no doubt familiar with most of the poetry written by his contemporaries and their recent predecessors, as well as with the numerous songs of love and patriotism which appear to have drifted on the Scottish air until they were at length captured and put on paper in a version that met with general acceptance. One of the most cherished of these songs, 'The Flowers of the Forest', for those who died on Flodden Field, was written down by Alison Rutherford (1712–94) in a weak English version ('I've seen the smiling of Fortune beguiling') before Jean Eliot (1727–1805) produced hers about 1763 in Lallans (Lowland Scots) ('I've heard them lilting at our yowe-milking') and gave her country one of its most moving yet most exquisitely controlled songs of lamentation.

> At e'en in the gloaming, nae swankies are roaming,
> 'Bout stacks with the lasses at bogle to play;
> But ilk maid sits drearie, lamenting her dearie—
> The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

yowe] ewe swankies] smart and well-built youths bogle] hide-and-seek
ilk] each a' wede away] all vanished and dead

Genuine Scots verse—genuine in language, in spirit, and in feeling—appears refreshingly but too seldom amid a tangled undergrowth of sentimental verse in dialect enfeebled either by expatriate nostalgia or by an inclination to treat Scots as a picturesque and 'quaint' manner of speech. There is little true native ring in the poems of William Julius Mickle (1735–88) who, after his bankruptcy as an Edinburgh brewer, migrated to Oxford to become a printer's reader there and later acted as secretary to a naval commander. His *Poetical Works*, published in 1806, included the popular 'There's nae luck about the house'; but his best-known piece, 'Cumnor Hall', appeared in a supplementary volume to Thomas Evans's *Old Ballads* (Vol. IV, 1784). James Beattie (1735–1803), though born in Scotland, wrote without pretence in eighteenth-century mannered English poetic diction, using in his major work *The Minstrel* (1771) an undistinguished imitation of the Spenserian stanza.

It was as a force withering pseudo-Scots and breaking if only temporarily the bondage to English, that the poetry of Robert

Fergusson (1750–74) was of the first importance. Good Scottish broadcloth was his muse's wear:

Ye who are fain to hae your name
Wrote in the bonny book o' Fame,
Let Merit no pretension claim
To laurel's wreath,
But hap ye weel, baith back and wame,
In gude Braid Claith.

He that some ells o' this may fa',
And slae-black hat on pow like snaw,
Bids bauld to bear the gree awa',
Wi' a' this graith,
Whan beinly clad wi' shell fu' braw
O' gude Braid Claith.

hap] wrap wame] belly fa'] win slae] sloe pow] head (poll)
gree] prize graith] substance (wealth) beinly] comfortably
wi' shell fu' braw] with covering full fine (i.e. with handsome clothes)

Fergusson, the son of a clerk in the British Linen Company, was born in Edinburgh and educated at Dundee and St. Andrews. Having refused to become either a minister or a doctor, he worked in turn in the offices of the Commissary's clerk and the Sheriff's clerk in Edinburgh. The publication of poems by him in the *Weekly Magazine* in 1771 brought him into the company of a hard-drinking circle whose dissolute habits he followed until he met John Brown, a sometime shepherd lad who became pastor of Haddington and later a Professor of Theology and compiler of a Bible dictionary. Though under Brown's influence Fergusson reformed, his conversion to religion took a morbid turn and his brief life ended in insanity, following serious injury in a fall. His *Poems* were published in 1773 and later in the same year appeared 'The Farmer's Ingle', a direct precursor of Burns's 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Fergusson's poem keeps much closer to the rustic dialect than Burns's does, and as a 'chant in hamely strain' it is more convincing and breathes more of the native air. 'I sing', wrote Burns,

. . . I sing, in simple *Scottish* lays,
The lowly train in life's sequester'd scene;
The native feelings strong, the guileless ways; . . .

but by using in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' a far larger proportion of English literary (and even rhetorical) language—e.g.

> O happy love! where love like this is found!
> O heart-felt raptures! bliss beyond compare!

—Burns sacrifices much of the simplicity, the sense of lowly life, the native feeling, and the guilelessness that Fergusson preserves:

> Weel kens the gudewife that the pleughs require
> A heartsome meltith and refreshin' synd
> O' nappy liquor owre a bleezin' fire:
> Sair wark and poortith downa weel be join'd.
> Wi' butter'd bannocks now the girdle reeks;
> I' the far nook the bowie briskly reams;
> The readied kail stands by the chimley cheeks,
> And haud the riggin' het wi' welcome streams,
> Whilk than the daintiest kitchen nicer seems.

pleughs] ploughs; ploughmen heartsome meltith] hearty meal synd] drink nappy liquor] strong ale Sair wark and poortith downa] heavy work and poverty cannot bowie] ale barrel reams] froths readied kail] cooked food; vegetable soup; stew haud the riggin' het] keeps the rafters warm whilk] which

Burns

It is likely that Burns's lapses into an inappropriate gentility of language in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' were not unconnected with its dedication to a man of wealth and breeding, Robert Aiken, the lawyer of Ayr who helped to establish Burns. There are few such lapses in his work, and few poets have had a greater certainty of taste or finer tact in the employment and association of words. Though only a relatively small number of his poems present real difficulty to English readers and hundreds of lines are nothing but English, Burns's bilingual use of Scots and English produced a series of harmonious compositions, which, time after time, achieve a miniature perfection in song. In his best poems whatever is English in verbal form is assimilated into an entirely accordant personal word-music and natural speech.

Robert Burns (1759–96) was born at Alloway in Ayrshire, the eldest in the family of William Burnes, a cotter or small

tenant farmer ('gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate', wrote Burns) from whom he received the beginnings of his education before passing on at the age of about seven to a local schoolmaster, John Murdoch. In the following year (1766) he started work—'I was a dextrous Ploughman'—on the farm at Mount Oliphant to which his father had moved, and apart from a few weeks' further instruction (in English grammar and French) from Murdoch in 1773 he had no more formal education until he went to school at Kirkoswald in 1775, two years after his first experience of love and his first song, 'Handsome Nell'. William Burnes—after falling at Mount Oliphant into the clutches of a grasping factor remembered by his son in 'The Twa Dogs':

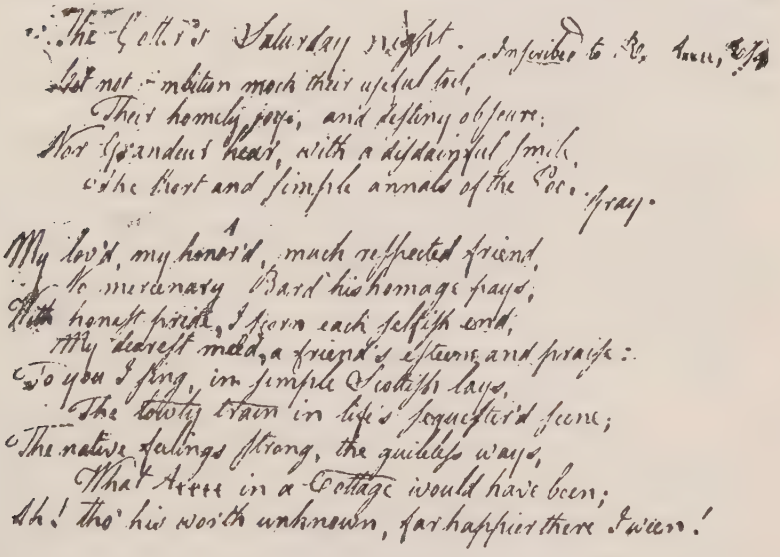
> . . . mony a time my heart's been wae,
> Poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,
> How they maun thole a factor's snash:
> He'll stamp and threaten, curse and swear
> He'll apprehend them, poind their gear;
> While they maun stan', wi' aspect humble,
> And hear it a', an' fear an' tremble!

wae] sad maun thole . . . snash] must bear . . . abuse poind] distrain; impound (seize)

—migrated in 1777 to a larger farm at Lochlie, where the father died in 1784, 'just saved from absorption in a jail by phthisical consumption' 'after three years tossing and whirling in the vortex of Litigation' with his landlord. Meanwhile Robert had learned flax-dressing, but during the two years following his father's death he farmed with his brother Gilbert at Mossgiel. His daughter by Elizabeth Paton was born in 1785, and in 1786 he determined to emigrate to Jamaica to take up an offered post as overseer on a plantation.

By that time he had already written (besides 'The Twa Dogs') 'The Holy Fair', 'Address to the Deil', 'Halloween', 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', 'To a Mouse', 'Despondency, an Ode', 'To a Mountain-Daisy', 'To a Louse', and other pieces; enough, he judged, to make a book that would pay his passage to the West Indies. *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, printed by John Wilson and published at Kilmarnock on 31 July 1786, was to become one of the world's most famous

books. The 'Kilmarnock Burns', far from taking an inconspicuous young Scottish farmer to Jamaica, kept him in his own land and founded the reputation which was to make him, for all time as it seems, the national poet not only of Scotland but of Scots throughout the world. Less than three months later on 3 September, Jean Armour (whom he at length married in 1788) bore him twins. On 27 November he went to Edinburgh and there became popular with a convivial literary set and made some £500 from the second (Edinburgh) edition of his poems.


The Cotter's Saturday Night. Inscribed to R. Aiken, Esq.

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor. Gray.

My lov'd, my honor'd, much respected friend,
No mercenary Bard his homage pays;
With honest pride, I scorn each selfish end,
My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and praise:
To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
The lowly train in life's sequester'd scene;
The native feelings strong, the guileless ways,
What Aiken in a Cottage would have been;
Ah! tho' his worth unknown, far happier there I ween!

He travelled in the Border country in the summer and in the Highlands in the autumn of 1787. Having taken a farm near Dumfries in the spring of 1788 he left it in the management of his wife and became an Excise officer in Dumfries, where he died on 21 July 1796 of rheumatic fever brought on by exposure during a drunken bout.

Burns had too many love affairs, he drank too much, and he died too soon. If he had loved less, drunk less, and lived longer he would have been a more respectable citizen, a more reliable husband, and either a worthy farmer or a worthy exciseman. Whether it would have been more desirable thus than that he should be a great poet is fortunately an unanswerable question.

He could not have been thus and also the great poet that he was, for in Burns's poetry as it is there is all of Burns himself as he was. We cannot with honesty or sense praise the poet and deplore the man: the man was the poet, the poet the man. From his lusts, his bawdiness, his often shabby way of life came —as flowers come from the dirty mould of earth—what is probably the most beautiful single group of songs ever written, at least in Britain. But as flowers come of the sun and air as well as of the earth, so Burns's poems came of the light of his spirit and the virtue of his mind as well as of his baser worldly experience. What he sang of *Robin* was a song of himself:

There was a lad was born in Kyle,
But whatna day o' whatna style
I doubt it's hardly worth the while
To be sae nice wi' *Robin.*

Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin', rantin' rovin';
Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin' Robin.

. . . . . .

He'll hae misfortunes great and sma',
But ay a heart aboon them a';
He'll be a credit till us a',
We'll a' be proud o' *Robin.*

. . . . . .

Guid faith, quo' scho, I doubt you, Sir,
Ye gar the lasses lie aspar,
But twenty fauts ye may hae waur
So blessin's on thee, *Robin!*

Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin', rantin' rovin';
Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin' Robin.

rantin'] roistering aboon] above scho] she gar] make aspar] aspread fauts] faults waur] worse

The tenderness of his love songs to Mary, to Jean, to Peggy, to Eppie, is counterbalanced by the satirical savagery to which he was moved by intolerance and hypocrisy, as in 'Holy

Willie's Prayer'. He could be playfully humorous as in 'To a Louse', yet end it with a profound (though now proverbial and commonplace) reflection:

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> *To see oursels as others see us!*
> It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
> An' foolish notion:
> What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
> An ev'n Devotion.

—and offset that again with the enchanting lines 'To a Mountain Daisy'. Like other Scottish poets he borrowed and adapted from traditional songs and folklore, but he transformed and made all that he took his own. He contributed to many of the song books and anthologies then in vogue, e.g. James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803) and George Thomson's *Scottish Airs with Poetry* (1792). His contact with the antiquary Francis Grose produced an excellent letter to Grose (undated, but written in 1790) in which Burns tells three of the many witch stories that had been related to him at various times. It was also for Grose that he turned one of the witch stories into the best of his sustained narrative poems, 'Tam O'Shanter'.

Contemporaries and Successors of Burns

The Jacobite songs of Carolina, Lady Nairne (1766–1845) have retained a poetic currency long outlasting their patriotic occasions, 'Will ye no come back again' and 'Charlie is my darling' having secured the standing of popular national songs, while they are often annexed by non-Scottish singers. A few of her ballads in a different mode, 'The Laird o' Cockpen' and 'The Land of the Leal', have also survived with undiminished vigour.

James Hogg (1770–1835), who wrote voluminously in verse and prose and was much esteemed by contemporaries, began as a shepherd in his native region of Ettrick Forest. As a writer of verse he secured the interest of Sir Walter Scott, to whose collections of traditional ballads, *Border Minstrelsy*, he contributed. Hogg established friendly relationships with Southey, Wordsworth, and Byron, wrote for *Blackwood's Magazine*, and in

the imaginary conversations of the *Noctes Ambrosianae*[1] papers in *Blackwood* he appears as the Ettrick Shepherd. Among his prose works *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is a remarkable piece of diablerie combining something of the romantic excess and atmosphere of the gothic novel with the psychological particularity of a Freudian study. An unwilling bride rejects her husband on the wedding night, but at length bears two sons, the younger of whom, disowned by his putative father, is brought up as the son of a local minister. He encounters 'a young man of mysterious appearance' who becomes his constant companion and, persuading him that as 'a justified sinner' he is assured of immunity from damnation, incites him to heinous crimes including the murder of his own brother. He is drawn more and more and inescapably into the power of the mysterious young man, who assumes many shapes and guises, and is, of course, Satan. The two-part narrative is given first in the words of an 'editor' relating the matter as a traditional story, and then in the 'justified sinner's' own account. Considered as a novel, the book has many shortcomings: the characters have no independent life, the story does not stand out clearly from the background, and it is tediously protracted. But as a parable it has force; as a satire directed against a particular form of religious belief it is remorseless; as a study of a consciously degenerating personality unable to escape from an ever-closing net it has a terrifying inevitability; and, incongruous though this may seem, it has a flash or two of almost hilarious humour.

In verse, Hogg reached his best in *The Queen's Wake* (1813), a linked group of narrative poems supposed to be sung by bards before Mary Queen of Scots. Though as a whole this work has been almost entirely forgotten, it included two pieces upon which Hogg's dwindled reputation now rests: the ballad of 'Kilmeny', and 'The Witch o' Fife'.

Of the other lesser poets born in Scotland before 1800, Thomas Campbell (1777–1844) strayed far from native themes in his large works, *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799) and *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809), while the ballad of 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' though Highland in setting is English in language. His 'Hohen-

[1] See below, p. 144.

linden' and 'Ye Mariners of England' are firmly set among the perennial anthology pieces. Allan Cunningham (1784–1842), after having contributed some pieces of his own invention to *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, 'collected' by R. H. Cromek (1810), brought out *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (1822) and *The Songs of Scotland, Ancient and Modern* (1825), and also a prose compilation *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1829–33). Cunningham's pieces in the Cromek volume included the imitation-traditional 'Hame, hame, hame, Hame fain wad I be, O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie' and 'The sun rises bright in France', which again harps on 'my ain countrie' and contains as a typical stanza

> It's nae my ain ruin
> That weets ay my ee,
> But the dear Marie I left a-hin',
> Wi' sweet bairnies three.

The authorship of 'The Canadian Boat Song' has been dubiously credited by some to John Galt (1779–1839), who certainly visited Canada. The song appeared anonymously in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1829, and while there is nothing Scottish in its style or diction it has become famous as a song of exile and has at least one stanza which rises above mere nostalgia:

> From the lone sheiling of the misty island
> Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas—
> Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
> And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

Galt could afford to be robbed of credit for 'The Canadian Boat Song', if he was indeed its author, for his novels[1] give him a more substantial place in literature.

The Poetry of Scott

The immensity of Sir Walter Scott's total output of writings was at once the fundamental mark of his genius, the source of his long popularity, and the cause of the decline in his reputation during the present century. A great gift of imaginative

[1] See below, pp. 150–2.

invention does not come by taking thought, nor is it accompanied by a painstaking sense of form. It is as powerful and uncontrollable as a river in flood, and like a river in flood it carries much silt. For twentieth-century readers there is overwhelmingly much of Scott: too many books and, far more dauntingly, too many words in almost every one of those too many books. For readers in Scott's own generation, however, and throughout the Victorian Age which was to begin within five years of his death, amplitude of creation and fecundity of expression were far from unwelcome: the curse of hurry and the blight of inattention had not yet befallen mankind. There was time in plenty to read and to enjoy; the ability of authors to produce was matched by the capacity of readers to absorb.

The modern critical and analytical mind is bound to deplore that the genius of Scott was so wastefully unselective; but nature itself is as unselective and as wasteful, and Scott's was a natural, instinctive, genius. If he had written much less he could have been in technique a much better writer; yet, being Scott, he would scarcely have been a better poet and certainly he would have been a worse novelist. In his novels a studied care for style and form would have dammed that onrush of humanity's blood and spirit which made him a new portent among British novelists. And it was as a novelist that he found himself, in 1814, when he was well past forty. Though his narrative poems are novels in verse, like all their kind they are, as novels, aborted. It is imperative to a novel that it should find its own way of life, without the restrictions upon free movement imposed by metre, rhyme, or stanzaic form. While in the majority of his novels Scott ransacked the past for themes and settings—and thereby brought to birth the Historical Novel as a distinctive genre—they are at their best more important as novels of life than as novels of past life. They are primarily original creations, and hardly more than incidentally reconstructions. If it were not that his literary impulses were so powerfully stirred in early years by a passion for the old ballads, a critic could take leave to say that as a novelist of contemporary life Scott might have become even more important. Indeed, in *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary* he showed that he could without loss turn away from the remote past.

Nevertheless, the eighteenth-century cult of antiquity[1] had him in thrall from boyhood, and the sources of his poetry lie there.[2]

The son of a writer to the signet, Walter Scott (1771–1832) was born in Edinburgh and educated at the High School and University of that city, where he also followed his father's profession and was called to the Bar when he was twenty-one. Six years later (1797) he married the daughter of a refugee from revolutionary France, Charlotte Mary Carpenter, and in 1799 became deputy sheriff of Selkirkshire. He travelled widely in Scotland and, his early interest in the ballads having been further stimulated by reading Percy's *Reliques*[3] and by his own investigations into ballad poetry at home and abroad, he published translations from the German, some original ballads, and in 1802–3 *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This collection of traditional poems, though it showed scant respect for the textual purity to which later collectors devoted themselves, preserved a very large number of the finest ballads formerly dependent upon the hazards of oral transmission.[4] Among Scott's 'imitations' contributed to the *Minstrelsy* volumes, the ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer' in three parts—'ancient', 'modernized', and 'modern'—best illustrates that side of his work.

He proceeded in 1805 to publish his own first lengthy poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a 'poetic romance' based on an old border legend of a family feud, with a plan for vengeance introducing a 'goblin page', single combat between rival champions, and a happy ending which unites the families. It is unlikely that the poem will at any time regain its original popularity, for its language is artificial and outmoded, its settings and incidents theatrically gothic, and its metrical structure monotonous. Yet if the taste for such metrical romances were ever to return, it is possible that none of these present discouragements would weigh heavily. Even now, if heard—and as a minstrel's

[1] See Ward: II, pp. 215 ff.

[2] For further comment on Scott's novels see below, pp. 145 ff.

[3] See Ward: I, p. 47.

[4] A fair indication of the value of Scott's collection can be found in brief in *Border Ballads*, selected and edited by William Beattie (Penguin Poets, London, 1952), where the majority of the pieces are from *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. The most important later worker in this field was F. J. Child: *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882 and later).

lay it should be heard, not read silently from the book—some of the far-away music faintly returns. There is little more than this to say of Scott's other narrative poems. In *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *Rokeby* (1813), and *The Lord of the Isles* (1818), some few selected parts are greater than the whole, and the modern reader may well reflect that

> The vision of enchantment's past:
> Like frostwork in the morning ray,
> The fancied fabric melts away;
> Each Gothic arch, memorial-stone,
> And long, dim, lofty aisle, are gone;
> And, lingering last, deception dear,
> The choir's high sounds die on my ear.[1]

Through writing the great bulk of his verse in the alien English tongue Scott failed to make a major original contribution to native poetry. His importance in the short-lived Scottish poetical revival is almost wholly confined to the collection of ancient ballads; and in English literature his standing as a poet is determined by a relatively small group of songs extracted for the most part from the metrical romances and the novels: e.g. 'Lochinvar' (*Marmion*), 'A weary lot is thine, fair maid' (*Rokeby*), 'Ave Maria' and 'He is gone on the mountain' (*The Lady of the Lake*); 'County Guy' (*Quentin Durward*), 'Proud Maisie' (*The Heart of Midlothian*). In so far as it may be true that Scott turned from verse-writing because he felt unable to keep abreast of Byron, in that respect also Byron served literature well. As a poet and nothing but a poet Scott would have been one among a number of secondary figures along the stream of the European romantic movement, for his outlook was cosmopolitan. In some twenty prolific years as a poet he left a permanent legacy of only a handful of songs; in eighteen years as a novelist, the last of his life, he produced a long series of prose works whose popularity was unsurpassed until Dickens found a larger and permanent audience.

In spite of the then unexampled popularity of his writings and the esteem of many eminent fellow authors, Scott was not unanimously admired even in his lifetime. Coleridge, for

[1] *Marmion*: Introduction.

example, said that 'Walter Scott's poetry and novels . . . amuse without requiring any effort of thought, and without exciting any deep emotion'; and again, 'Not twenty lines of Scott's poetry will reach posterity; it has relation to nothing'.[1] 'Speaking of poetry', wrote Crabb Robinson,[2] 'Coleridge denied all merit to Scott, saying that to judge of his beauties you must strike out all the names of places, of ancient armour—all the interest-*names*, in fact, and seek for his images and sentiments. You would then perceive how little or nothing is in him.'

[1] *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford Standard Authors, 1917).

[2] *Diary*, 20 October 1811. See below, pp. 116 ff.

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CHAPTER IV

WOMEN OF LETTERS

In the discussion of gothic fiction (Chapter II above) Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe have been taken out of their chronological place among women writers, who began to play an important part in English literature in the second half of the eighteenth century and by the middle of the nineteenth had established themselves as novelists able not only to equal the best that men could do but even to outstrip them in fields which had long been a preserve of the male intellect. Jane Austen was to become, seemingly for all time, unequalled in her command of an exactly measured and perfectly disciplined satire; George Eliot brought to the novel new philosophical and psychological dimensions as well as pathos and a richer humour; Emily and Charlotte Brontë reached depths of tragedy and passion untouched before in prose fiction.

The professional woman of letters arrived only tardily, and it is hard to discern the point at which the amateur writer who had slipped into publication and unanticipated success, and thence into regular authorship, was succeeded by the literary 'career woman'. The versatile and ambiguous Mrs. Aphra Behn[1] combined the divers trades of spy, playwright, poet, and novelist, but as a professional woman of letters she stands without a fully engaged successor for at least a century, when Hannah More took more earnestly and more respectably to literary occupation. Between Aphra Behn and Hannah More there came, however, a group of hostesses whose combination of intellectual and social interests links their 'bluestocking' salons of the 1750s and after with the nineteenth-century Holland House gatherings and the Bloomsbury coterie of the 1920s and 1930s—as well as with a long and more trivial intermediate succession of fashionable parties for the lionizing of authors, musicians, and artists, where beauty and brains met, often uneasily, in Victorian and Edwardian drawing-rooms.

[1] See Ward: II, pp. 68, 179.

Learned Ladies

While an English Molière might easily have found in the eighteenth-century literary assemblies material for satire after the manner of *Les Femmes savantes* and *Les Précieuses ridicules*,[1] only in a carping mood of inverted snobbery could it be alleged that they made no solid contribution to literature and enlightenment. It was by a trick of mis-labelling that the term 'bluestockings' became attached to women who claimed the right to exercise their minds as well as their physical and social attributes. The original bluestocking was in fact a man. On being invited to an evening conversazione by Mrs. Elizabeth Vesey (?1715–91), Benjamin Stillingfleet, the grandson of a seventeenth-century bishop of Winchester, pleaded that he had no suitable clothes for such an occasion. He was told to appear in his ordinary daily wear, which included blue worsted stockings. Stillingfleet's abilities as a conversationalist were such that Boswell recorded[2] 'We can do nothing without the *blue stockings*; and thus by degrees the title was established.' Thereafter the women who gave or attended such parties were named after Stillingfleet's hose, though it is possible that a few of the more modish females themselves took to blue stockings.

Sarah Fielding (1710–68), Henry Fielding's sister, broke into the literary world in 1744 with *The Adventures of David Simple: Containing an Account of his Travels Through the Cities of London and Westminster, in the Search of a Real Friend.* Though this mildly picaresque novel, published as 'By a Lady', was thought by some to be a pseudonymous work by Henry Fielding and was fulsomely praised by Samuel Richardson, it is merely an ingenuous 'Moral Romance' in which, by a forged will, David is robbed of his inheritance by his brother Daniel, whereupon he leaves home with only half a crown, from which he gives sixpence to a beggar. When Daniel's villainy is exposed and the property bequeathed by his father recovered, David takes 'a Journey through *London*; not as some Travellers do, to see the Buildings, the Streets, to know the Distances from one Place to another, with many more Sights of equal Use and Improvement;

[1] Sheridan mocked the grosser absurdities in *The School for Scandal*, Act I, Sc. i.

[2] *Life of Johnson*, May 1781.

but his design was to seek out one capable of being a real Friend, and to assist all those, who had been thrown into Misfortune by the ill Usage of others'. Sarah Fielding's reach was beyond her grasp, for she was disabled by a total lack of appropriate experience and could draw only upon romantic and sentimental fancy. The present interest of *David Simple* is limited to its pioneer place in the line of moral romances which became a particular product of women novelists in the next two generations.

Apart from domestic affairs, intelligent women's daily round up to the middle of the eighteenth century held little but card-playing and gossiping chit-chat. Rational conversation on matters of wider interest was the prerogative of men, a fact noted with disfavour by Swift and in a measure rectified, though without set purpose, by Johnson through his presence at the Veseys' and others' mixed parties.

It was Johnson who, in no spirit of commendation, named Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu (1720–1800) 'the Queen of the Blues'. Long before her marriage to Edward Montagu in 1742 Elizabeth Robinson had become prominent in social and intellectual circles with her learning, wit, and forceful personality. If she was vain and pushing, as the comments of some of her acquaintances suggest, she nevertheless won the esteem of eminent men, even of those who were not blind to her defects nor deluded by her extravagant flatteries. Kindness to needy authors offset her hunger for adulation by the great, and she won independent literary repute with three contributions to George (1st Baron) Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead* (1760), and with an *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769), in which she boldly crossed pens with Voltaire, whose attacks on Shakespeare were part of the long campaign of the classicists against the romantic drama's informality and neglect of 'rules'.

Johnson, one of the few contemporaries who turned a cold eye upon Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay*, was more encouraging to another renowned bluestocking, Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806) —who acquired with laborious devotion a wide knowledge of languages, ancient and modern—and he admitted pieces by her to two issues of *The Rambler*. She made translations of French and Italian writings on Pope's poetry and Newton's

philosophy before achieving a spectacular success, abroad as well as in England, with her version of the writings of the Stoic ex-slave philosopher Epictetus, which brought her an income as well as long-continued repute.

Hannah More and Others

The aim of the first bluestockings had been to free their sex and social class from intellectual segregation and to attain cultural equality with men. Hannah More (1745–1833) came into the circle as a bluestocking of the second generation, with a less circumscribed outlook and a temperament saturated by the peculiar blend of religious zeal and social conservatism which was to outlast her lifetime and dominate the Victorians.

An older contemporary, Mrs. Hester Chapone, (1727–1801) had given a sober turn to literary parties. She wrote a little for *The Rambler*, was one of Richardson's company of admiring ladies, and published in 1774 her principal work, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady*, which embraced directions on religion, 'the Regulation of the Heart and Affections', 'the Government of the Temper', 'Politeness and Accomplishments', 'Oeconomy', 'Geography and Chronology', and 'the Manner and Course of Reading History'. The general tone and purport of these letters, written as from an aunt to a niece, may be judged from two quotations: 'Among other *historians*, do not forget my darling Shakespear'. . . . 'My love for you, my dearest child, extends its views beyond this frail and transitory existence—it considers you as a candidate for immortality—as entering the list for the prize of your high calling—as contending for a crown of unfading glory.'

To a similar class Hannah More addressed her first work. Like Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Carter she developed in early life a passion for learning, and shared with her sisters in conducting a school at Bristol before making her contact with literary society in London, the year after publishing *The Search After Happiness: A Pastoral Drama for Young Ladies* (1773). In a later preface to this piece—the chief characters are 'four young ladies of distinction', Euphelia, Cleora, Pastorella, and Laurinda—Hannah More said that she wrote it 'in very early youth' with 'an earnest wish to furnish a substitute for the very improper custom, which then prevailed, of allowing plays, and

those not always of the purest kind, to be acted by young ladies in boarding schools. . . . If it may be still happily instrumental in promoting a regard to religion and virtue in the minds of young persons, and afford them an innocent, and perhaps not altogether unuseful, amusement in the exercise of recitation' her purpose would be fulfilled.

In London she saw Garrick act, was immediately carried away by admiration, and soon became a close friend of him and his wife, who opened their home to her. Under Garrick's eye she wrote *Percy*, a tragedy produced by him at Drury Lane in 1777. Its success on the stage and in print encouraged her to write *The Fatal Falsehood*, with a characteristic moral prologue:

> . . . The scenes of private life our author shows,
> A simple story of domestic woes;
> Nor unimportant is the glass we hold,
> To shew the effect of passions uncontroll'd.
> For if to govern realms belongs to few,
> Yet all who live have passions to subdue.
> Self-conquest is the lesson books should preach,
> Self-conquest is the theme the stage should teach.
> Vouchsafe to learn this obvious duty here,
> The verse though feeble yet the moral's clear.

Garrick died shortly before this play was staged with only moderate success in 1779, and the loss of her friend having caused Hannah More to develop religious objections to the theatre she ceased to write for it.

With *The Bas Bleu, or Conversation* (1786) she became in effect the laureate of the bluestockings. In the prefatory Author's Advertisement she recorded that their parties

> were composed of persons distinguished in general for their rank, talents, or respectable character, who met frequently at Mrs. Vesey's and at a few other houses, for the sole purpose of conversation, and were different in no respect from other parties, but that the company did not play at cards. . . . . Learning was as little disfigured by pedantry, good taste as little tinctured by affectation, and general conversation as little disgraced by calumny, levity, and the other censurable errors with which it is too commonly tainted, as has perhaps been known in any society.

In the course of the poem, which begins 'Vesey! of verse the judge and friend!', the leading bluestockings and the men who

attended their parties (Johnson and Horace Walpole among them) are named in accents which faintly echo Pope:

> Long was society o'er-run
> By whist, that desolating Hun;
> Long did quadrille despotic sit,
> That Vandal of colloquial wit;
> And conversation's setting light
> Lay half-obscur'd in Gothic night;
> At length the mental shades decline,
> Colloquial wit begins to shine;
> Genius prevails, and conversation
> Emerges into *reformation.*
> The vanquish'd triple crown to you
> Boscawen[1] sage, bright Montagu,
> Divided, fell; . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . polish'd Walpole shew'd the way
> How wits may be both learn'd and gay;
> And Carter taught the female train,
> The deeply wise are never vain;
> And she, who Shakespeare's wrongs redrest,
> Prov'd that the brightest are the best. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Here, rigid Cato,[2] awful sage!
> Bold censor of a thoughtless age,
> Once dealt his pointed moral round,
> And not unheeded fell the sound.

Hannah More's growing concern for the condition and behaviour of the poorer classes led her to write under a pen-name *Village Politics* (1792), a dialogue between Jack Anvil the blacksmith and Tom Hod the mason, 'Addressed to all the Mechanics, Journeymen, and Labourers in Great Britain. By Will Chip, a Country Carpenter.' Seeking 'to counteract the pernicious doctrines' of the French Revolution, she produced not a balanced political discussion but a weighted sermon against Tom the 'leveller and republican', putting her own opinions into the mouth of Jack:

> If thou wou'dst shew thy love for thy king and country, let's have no drinking, no riot, no bonfires, but put in practice this text,

[1] Mrs. Boscawen, wife of Admiral Boscawen. [2] i.e. Samuel Johnson.

which our parson preached on last Sunday, 'Study to be quiet, work with your hands, and mind your own business'.

Jack Anvil also neatly summarizes Hannah More's political and religious philosophy in relation to those whom she believed to be the ordained lower orders: '. . . we have as much liberty as can make us happy, and more trade and riches than allows us to be good'. Aided by government and private subsidized editions, *Village Politics* was a huge success. It was followed by the first of the penny tracts which Hannah More continued to publish at the rate of three a month for three years, collecting them (from 1797) in volume form as *Cheap Repository Tracts*, some with wood engravings by Thomas Bewick. Two millions of the tracts were sold in the first year and they prepared the ground for the foundation in 1799 of the Religious Tract Society, now still fully active as an agency for the worldwide distribution of Christian literature. In the preceding decade Hannah More had sought to reform a more intractable class with *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1788), addressed to 'persons considerable in reputation, important by their condition in life, and commendable by the decency of their general conduct', who were urged to consider that mere decorum of manners without strict attention to religious principles was a constant source of danger, and that Christian doctrine required the supporting evidence of Christian living.

In a correspondingly high strain Hannah More wrote her novel *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1809). Literary and story interest is subordinated to moral and social propaganda in the hero's quest of a bride fitted with a set of virtues such as his now-dead parents would have approved. In Lucilla Stanley he finds an approximation to the ideal sketched in the bill of particulars his mother had held up:

> I call education, not that which is made up of the shreds and patches of useless arts, but that which inculcates principles, polishes taste, regulates temper, cultivates reason, subdues the passions, directs the feelings, habituates to reflection, trains to self-denial, and, more especially, that which refers all actions, feelings, sentiments, tastes, and passions to the love and fear of God.

It is evident that in Hannah More 'Victorianism' flowered long before the Victorian Age began.

Writing for children, Mrs. Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810) and Mrs. Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743–1825)—whom Charles Lamb ridiculed as 'those blights and blasts of childhood'—were moved by purposes closely akin to Hannah More's. Sarah Kirby, who migrated from Ipswich to London with her parents, mixed with writers and artists through her brother, a pupil of Gainsborough. On marrying a Mr. Trimmer in 1762 she settled at Brentford and bore and educated six sons and six daughters. The lessons she devised for them developed into *An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature* (1782) which continued to be used for a generation or more, but her most lastingly popular piece was 'The Story of the Robins'. This formed part of *Fabulous Histories designed for the Instruction of Children respecting their Treatment of Animals* (1786) and is an early, naïvely mawkish, specimen of the type[1] of animal-cum-human literature for children which has persisted and multiplied beyond counting. Mrs. Trimmer's hen and cock robins personify her ideal of mamma- and papa-hood, though, as the following quotation shows, she either took a sly humorous view of husbands or accepted a dual-purpose function for wives:

> At length the day arrived when the happy mother heard the chirping of her little ones; with inexpressible tenderness she spread her maternal wings to cover them, threw out the egg-shells in which they before lay confined, then pressed them to her bosom, and presented them to her mate, who viewed them with rapture, and seated himself by her side, that he might share her pleasure.
>
> We may promise ourselves much delight in rearing our little family, said he, but it will occasion us a great deal of trouble; I would willingly bear the whole myself, but it will be impossible for me, with my utmost labour and industry to supply all our nestlings with what is sufficient for their daily support; it will therefore be necessary for you to leave the nest sometimes, to seek provisions for them. . . .

Conforming with current tendencies, Mrs. Trimmer sought

[1] A type perfected by Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932) in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and, for younger children, by Beatrix Potter in her illustrated Peter Rabbit stories (1902 onward).

to combine religious education with the maintenance of contented social inequality, setting up Sunday schools (as Hannah More was doing elsewhere) and a 'school of industry' at Brentford, and editing (1788–9) the *Family Magazine* 'for the instruction and amusement of cottagers and servants'.

Mrs. Barbauld was a more prominent literary figure. Both her father and her husband were dissenting ministers, and the Rev. Rochemont Barbauld started a boys' school in Suffolk after his marriage in 1774 to Anna Aikin. She was long and widely esteemed for her *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) and *Early Lessons for Children* (1778), but with little equipment she ventured into a larger field by undertaking to edit a collection in fifty volumes of the best English novels and to write introductions and a prefatory essay on 'The Origin and Progress of Novel Writings'. Her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* reflected in its pessimism the national mood during a critical phase of the Napoleonic wars; and, whatever its poetic limitations may be, in its attitude it differs little from that of much verse and prose written in the wake of the twentieth-century World Wars:

> . . . Britain, know,
> Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Yes, thou must droop; thy Midas dream is o'er;
> The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore. . . .

The *Hymns in Prose*, intended for recitation, comprise a not unimpressive attempt to unite in rhythmical speech the praise of God with a perception of the beauties of nature, e.g. in Hymn VI:

> . . . I have walked through the thick forest; the wind whispered among the trees; the brook fell from the rocks with a pleasant murmur; the squirrel leapt from bough to bough; and the birds sung to each other amongst the branches.
>
> Didst thou hear nothing, but the murmur of the brook? no whispers, but the whispers of the wind? Return again, child of reason, for there are greater things than these.—God was amongst the trees; his voice sounded in the murmur of the water; his music warbled in the shade; and didst thou not attend? . . .

Johnson despised Mrs. Barbauld as an educator, both on account of the poor view he took of all infant teaching and

because she had made no more of her own 'early cultivation' than to marry 'a little Presbyterian parson', but he praised or at any rate suffered her as a parodist of his own literary style, saying 'Miss Aikin has done it the best; she imitated the sentiment as well as the diction'.[1]

Fanny Burney

The bluestocking parties had passed high noon before Fanny Burney (1752–1840) was of an age to share in them, and her elevation to a Court appointment in 1786 prevented her becoming an habituée, though her intelligence and vivacity and her talent as a novelist guaranteed her a cordial welcome. Born at Lynn Regis in Norfolk, where her father was organist, she did not as a child show promise of the gifts developed later. But when Dr. Charles Burney moved with her to London, where he became an intimate of the Johnson circle and author of the first comprehensive *History of Music* (1776–89), she served as his secretary and began to write on her own account. After long cogitation of the theme, she produced her first book anonymously when she was twenty-six, having written it without her family's knowledge. Speculation concerning the identity of the author of *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) increased the interest which the story itself aroused among the fashionable; and though when her identity was made known Fanny Burney was found to be a less youthfully romantic figure than had been imagined, she quickly became as popular as her book. A second novel, *Cecilia; or, The Memoirs of an Heiress* came out in 1782, and four years later she was made a Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte. In 1793 she married General D'Arblay, a refugee from revolutionary France, and was subsequently interned in that country for ten years during the Napoleonic wars. Two other novels, *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth* (1796) and *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814), completed her fictional writings. She attempted playwriting without success, the only piece to reach performance, *Edwy and Elgiva* (1795), being given but once. Her edited *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* (1832) is a partial portrait. She left as her principal legacy to posterity the *Early Diary, 1768–1778* (first published in 1889) and the *Diary and Letters,*

[1] See Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, 5 December 1775; 19 September 1777.

1778–1840 (seven volumes, issued between 1842 and 1846). These are at once an entertaining account of her life and friends and an invaluable picture of the period.

Evelina started that new type of fiction—the domestic novel—in which Jane Austen was to excel. The story, of a nobleman who deserts his wife and child and later has a changeling foisted upon him before Evelina is at length found to be his rightful daughter, is of little account; but the novel-in-letters form adopted by the author is excellently managed for the main purpose of the book, since the letters from Evelina to the other correspondents enabled Fanny Burney to equip the heroine with the liveliness and sparkle, the comic sense and not inconsiderable wit, as well as the sensitiveness to social humiliations, which were leading factors in her own make-up. Moreover, Evelina's impressions of the London scene and its fashionable life—the theatres, Vauxhall, Marybone Gardens, the Hampstead Assembly, and such places of resort—have a first-hand authenticity and show an acute eye for absurdity and a buoyant sense of fun in which occasional touches of romantic melodrama are only passingly discordant. The first of Evelina's letters (VIII) begins in her distinctive personal key:

> This house seems to be the house of joy; every face wears a smile, and a laugh is at everybody's service. It is quite amusing to walk about, and see the general confusion; . . . Lady Howard does not sit a moment in a place; Miss Mirvan is making caps; every body so busy!—such flying from room to room!—so many orders given, and retracted, and given again!—nothing but hurry and perturbation.

In Evelina's French grandmother, Madame Duval, the book presents one of the notable comic characters of English fiction; though vulgar and farcical she is not overdrawn and in her moments of acute discomfiture sympathy is not withheld. 'I consoled and soothed her', writes Evelina (Letter XXXIII) after a practical joke had been played on Mme Duval by a mock highwayman who trussed and deposited her

> seated upright in a ditch. I flew to her, with unfeigned concern at her situation. She was sobbing, nay, almost roaring, and in the utmost agony of rage and terror. . . . I desired [the footman] to lend me a knife; I returned with it and cut the rope. Her feet

were soon disentangled, and then, though with great difficulty, I assisted her to rise.

Here, some concession to sentiment might be expected, in a show of gratitude from aunt Duval: 'But what was my astonishment, when, the moment she was up, she hit me a violent slap on the face!'

With her young men characters Fanny Burney was no more successful than the majority of English novelists. For Evelina a less commonplace husband than Lord Orville could be wished and a worthier cause of the lovelorn extravagance of phrase in her final letter: 'This morning, with fearful joy, and trembling gratitude, she united herself forever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection'. Nevertheless, a predominating emotional balance in Fanny Burney's novels safeguards them from the insipidity of the eighteenth-century fashionable cult of languishing sensibility. In her other three novels she tried to do more than in *Evelina*, but in stretching beyond the natural limits of her own powers she burdened them with the elegant diction of a consciously successful woman of letters and sacrificed the spontaneity which graced her first book.

Mary Wollstonecraft; Amelia Opie; Mary Shelley

In aiming to secure for themselves a measure of intellectual emancipation the bluestockings might be supposed to have prepared their followers to welcome later endeavours to improve the general standing of women. But Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) found, with one notable exception, no welcoming sisterly spirit when she published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Among her harshest critics were Hannah More and Mrs. Barbauld, by whose standards of moral conduct she was a bad woman. Her unhappy attachment to Gilbert Imlay not only laid upon her the responsibility of an illegitimate child but also moved her afterwards to attempt suicide; while her marriage to William Godwin[1] ended within a year, following the birth of the daughter who was to become Mary Shelley. After an abruptly ended period as a governess, Mary Wollstonecraft became a publisher's reader and translator. In 1791 she issued *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations calculated*

[1] See above, pp. 9 ff.

to Regulate the Affections, a later edition of which (1796) was illustrated by William Blake. Her *Letters to Imlay* written between June 1793 and December 1795 (published in 1879) are a distressful and moving record of tragically unregulated love.

The bluestockings' revolt, conducted well within the territory of the social graces, had been accompanied by no more drastic disturbance than the rejection of card-playing in favour of mixed conversation. Mary Wollstonecraft was an out-and-out feminist and had she lived a century later would undoubtedly have been a militant suffragist; her revolutionary temper and flouting of conventions made her doubly suspect to all who dreaded the contagion of subversive principles. Though *The Rights of Woman* has few striking literary qualities of its own, it stands as a landmark in the path of literary development: it adumbrated, without respect to class or caste, the social and intellectual equality of the sexes which was before long to effect a revolution in literature through the multiplication of books by women writers.

Mary Wollstonecraft found one ardent woman admirer in Amelia Alderson (1769–1853). They met in 1793, five years before Miss Alderson married John Opie, the painter, and, as Mrs. Amelia Opie, won contemporary renown as novelist and poet. She was born into a Unitarian household but became in her 'fifties a thoroughgoing member of the Religious Society of Friends, adopting their Quaker dress and mode of speech and abandoning novel-writing. She retained, however, the strong liking for social and literary intercourse which had brought her many eminent friends (Sheridan, Mme de Staël, and Sydney Smith among them), and also the love of fun to which may be attributed her saying that everything she saw for the first time was disappointing, except the English Lake District and Mary Wollstonecraft, upon whose experiences she based a novel, *Adeline Mowbray; or, The Mother and the Daughter* (1804). The conclusive verdict on Amelia Opie's novels was given by Mary Russell Mitford,[1] who found them a concoction of common sense, morality, love, wit, mawkishness, insipidity, and vulgarity. Her last book, *Lays for the Dead* (1833), consisted of verses in memory of her family and friends.

[1] See below, p. 165.

Mary Shelley (1797–1851) could be regarded either as one of the last of the gothic novelists or as an early pioneer of science fiction. In *The Last Man* (1826) she chose a theme which, in a more catastrophic variant, has returned to fiction in the atomic age, but *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is her outstanding work. This tale of a man-made synthetic creature which becomes a murdering monster and at length destroys its maker was designed to be a ghost story, but it so far outgrew its author's first intentions that—though by no prophetic foresight of her own—it has become for posterity a warning fable, a parable of Industrial Man at the mercy of the Machine. It took dæmonic possession of Mary Shelley before a word was put on paper. In bed, past midnight (she wrote):

> I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. . . . The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me. . . .[1]

At Shelley's instigation, what she had intended to be a short story was expanded into the novel, for which he wrote the Preface as in the author's person, saying that one of the chief concerns of the book was to exhibit 'the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue', the last phrase, if not the first, a characteristic Shelleyan touch. There can be little doubt that Shelley's advice destroyed what might otherwise have been a brief masterpiece of the macabre. In the 1831 Introduction Mary Shelley recaptured a vivid impression of her sensations when the story was born in that midnight vision fifteen years before; but in the long-drawn-out

[1] Introduction to the 1831 edition.

conduction of the theme through hundreds of pages the force of the idea was dissipated. *Frankenstein* endures not by virtue of the novel as Shelley persuaded his wife to write it, but through the imaginative gloss which successive generations have imposed upon the original conception, making it by turns a titbit for sensationalists and a text for the sin-conscious.

Maria Edgeworth and Susan Ferrier

The work of educationists in the modern world has been a series of blundering steps through what H. G. Wells called 'the valley of the shadow of education',[1] and the benefits have come more from unconscious achievement than from deliberation. Egged on by her father, an inventor and minor writer who lived until she was fifty, Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849) directed her uncommon abilities as a writer into the field of moral instruction, but she succeeded best when she was least didactic. With nauseous self-satisfaction Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817) wrote: 'It has been my daughter's aim to promote, by all her writings, the progress of education from the cradle to the grave'; and since he was accustomed to impose a collaborative hand upon her books the prefatory Advertisement to *Belinda* (1801) might well be his: '. . . The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale—the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel. . . . so much folly, errour, and vice are disseminated in books classed under this denomination, that it is hoped the wish to assume another title will be attributed to feelings that are laudable, and not fastidious.'

As a direct consequence of this paternal moral-mongering, Maria Edgeworth's tales were bound in a restrictive harness seriously hampering to an individual talent which, if left free, would have fallen little short of genius. Even in the actual circumstances, her stories of Irish life—through their 'rich humour, pathetic tenderness, and admirable tact'—led Sir Walter Scott to novel writing; while now, some century and a half later, her skill as a creator is evident through the veil of didacticism.

Castle Rackrent (1800), for the majority of present-day readers

[1] *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910).

her most likeable book, makes the customary genuflection to moral education in the so-named Author's Preface—

> We are surely justified . . . to collect the most minute facts relative to the domestic lives, not only of the great and good, but even of the worthless and insignificant, since it is only by a comparison of their actual happiness or misery in the privacy of domestic life that we can form a just estimate of the real reward of virtue, or the real punishment of vice. That the great are not so happy as they seem, that the external circumstances of fortune and rank do not constitute felicity, is asserted by every moralist. . . .

—but the account of the Rackrent family given in the language of their old steward, Thady Quirk, owes little of its interest and none of its lasting entertainment to moral reflections promoted by the hard-drinking of Sir Patrick, the lawsuiting of Sir Murtagh, the ill-temper (though at times, under provocation, wonderful restraint) of Sir Kit, or the prodigality of Sir Condy. As a period picture of Irish life and character *Castle Rackrent* still attracts, for it has no period fustiness. Its sentiment is free from sentimentality; its men and women embody Irish humour, Irish improvidence, and Irish pathos without concession to any fictional type or convention; and Thady as mouthpiece gives colloquial ease to the whole story. His description of Castle Rackrent in decay ('hearing the doors clap for want of right locks, and the wind through the broken windows, that the glazier never would come to mend, and the rain coming through the roof and best ceilings all over the house for want of the slater'); his account of the death of the ruined but always lovable Sir Condy (' "... Ay, Sir Condy has been a fool all his days," said he; and there was the last word he spoke, and died. He had but a very poor funeral after all.'); his own concluding observations ('For my part, I'm tired wishing for anything in this world, after all I've seen in it; but I'll say nothing—it would be a folly to be getting myself ill-will in my old age. . . .'): all have the directness, simplicity, and verbal economy of Maria Edgeworth's natural style. Her comic sense was no less well disciplined. Few passages convey so much while stating so little as the scene in which Sir Kit holds his temper in check and keeps a civil tongue while his bride asks a string of infuriating questions on first reaching her new home at the castle.

Maria Edgeworth settled with her father and other relatives

on the inherited family estates at Edgeworthstown in Ireland in 1782 (she was born in Oxfordshire), acting as accountant and dealing with the tenants. From this experience came her intimate first-hand knowledge of Irish affairs, and particularly of the evil consequences of absentee landlordism. Her major work, *The Absentee* (1812), began as a play which on political grounds the Lord Chamberlain declined to licence for performance, and she turned it into a novel. It 'concerns Irish landlords living in England, who ignore their natural duties and station in life, and whose chief ambition is to take their place in the English fashionable world'. Lord Clonbrony, disastrously in debt through his wife's extravagance in London society, is saved by the prudence and sense of social duty which move his son, Lord Colambre, to undertake the discharge of his father's debts on condition that Clonbrony returns to Ireland to look after the estate. Though *The Absentee* is propagandist in its main intention, it is nevertheless a genuine novel in which the message is carried fully by the story, not spatchcocked on to it: the author's creative sense is in charge throughout. A demonstration of the impressive level to which she could rise as a novelist can be found in Chapter XII, where Colambre, incognito, witnesses the abominable dealings of Garraghty—the absentee landlord's agent, 'an insolent petty tyrant in office'—with the unfortunate tenants. In this remarkable piece of tense writing the excitement rises steadily to the moment of climax when Colambre intervenes to the discomfiture, though by no means to the immediate defeat, of Garraghty. Maria Edgeworth treated pathos as an adult emotion without sobbing or whining; her dramatic passages are free from melodrama; while the visit of Mr. Soho the interior decorator to Lady Clonbrony (ch. II) instances her command of delicious absurdity. In her own time, however, these merits and accomplishments brought her far fewer readers than *Practical Education* (1798), *The Parent's Assistant* (1796–1801), and the more didactic of her moral tales.

What, seen in retrospect, Maria Edgeworth did for Ireland with her novels, and Jane Austen with hers for England, Susan Ferrier (1782–1854) did in a slighter degree for Scotland with *Marriage* (1818), *The Inheritance* (1824), and *Destiny* (1831). She

shared the Edgeworth conviction that works of imagination must be seriously purposive ('as the only good purpose of a book is to inculcate morality and convey some lesson of instruction and delight, I do not see that what is called a *good moral* can be dispensed with in a work of fiction'), but she lacked Maria Edgeworth's ability to weld instruction and entertainment; nor had she the constructive and organizing skill required for the production of a first-rate novel. There are good things in her books—humour especially, and a lively sense of the ridiculous—but since she had so little talent for integration the good things lie in scattered patches. She could not save the boring Miss Pratt in *The Inheritance* from being sometimes a bore to the reader, as Jane Austen always so dextrously saves the boring Miss Bates in *Emma*; but, among others, Lady MacLaughlan in *Marriage* is an excellent pre-Dickens type of comic character whose diverting eccentricity compensates Susan Ferrier's inability to create three-dimensionally. Moreover, her mannered diction—e.g. '. . . when the overflowings of a generous heart are confined within the narrow limits of its own bosom, and the offerings of love are rudely rejected by the hand most dear to us'; or, 'her example, like a kindly dew, was shedding its silent influence on the embryo blossoms of her pupil's heart'—is discouraging, yet for patient readers who surmount incidental discouragement there are rewarding pleasures.

CHAPTER V

WORDSWORTH, COLERIDGE, AND OTHERS

Unlike the poets of the second generation of the Romantic Revival, those of the Wordsworth generation are themselves, as men, unromantic at our distant view. In life and in the manner of their dying, Byron, Shelley, and Keats were figures of romance; for even though Keats was in fact killed by tuberculosis it can nevertheless still be imagined that he died of frustrated love, which is pleasanter in contemplation by the fanciful, if no easier for the sufferer. Moreover, their lives were short—'those whom the gods love die young'—whereas Wordsworth and his immediate contemporary poets, all but two born in the 1770s, may be said to have drifted out of life: Rogers past ninety; Coleridge at sixty-one, with his few great works twenty years or more behind him; Wordsworth at eighty, a seven-years' Poet Laureate but, as a creator, long exhausted and never in his lifetime an outwardly romantic figure. It has indeed disconcerted many to know that Wordsworth, the majestic force of the Romantic Revival and among the greatest of poets, was in appearance one of the most prosaic of men and an unengaging personality, solemn in early life,[1] in maturity and age withdrawn and a solitary mutterer of verses as he composed aloud during country wanderings. In appearance only, however, and in far retrospect; to intimates the impact of his genius, personal as well as poetic, was immediate and beyond question.

Time has sifted Wordsworth's work as rigorously as any. Much has been discarded, and posterity has had its fun with his lapses; but of the extensive and once-lauded output of his generation there remains as a permanent part of English literature a large body of his own poems and little else except the few which give Coleridge a unique place among the Romantics. The poetry of Rogers and Bloomfield, Southey, Landor, and Thomas Moore yields little now but a few pleasant lyrics and

[1] See *The Prelude* (1805 version), Book III, for Wordsworth's account of his sense of being a soul apart, 'a chosen Son', at the outset of his time at Cambridge.

echoes of the former high repute of imposing narrative and descriptive poems.

Samuel Rogers; Robert Bloomfield

Vagrant contemporary taste led to the offer of the Poet Laureateship to Samuel Rogers (1763–1855) in 1850 on the death of Wordsworth; he declined the appointment and the reversion went to Tennyson. Rogers, the son of a London banker, was an amateur of letters who won renown with a long eighteenth-centuryish poem, *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792), which clings to the old abstractions and artificiality of sentiment, though somewhat relaxing the formalities of poetic diction. Rogers's inherited wealth enabled him to benefit less fortunate writers,

while his conversational gifts made him welcome in literary society and give some continuing interest to *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers* (edited posthumously in 1856). A series of verse tales, published between 1822 and 1828, with the general title *Italy*, and illustrated by J. M. W. Turner, contains the best of his written work, though it is stiflingly 'picturesque' and cloyingly 'romantic' in a style already outmoded by the Romantics. Anthologies preserve a few of Rogers's simple lyrics, e.g. 'Mine be a cot beside the hill'.

Robert Bloomfield (1766–1823), at the other end of the social scale from Rogers, was variously shoemaker, manufacturer of musical instruments, bookseller, agricultural labourer. From his experience in the fields came his chief poem, *The Farmer's Boy* (1800), many thousands of which were sold in the first few

years, though with little alleviation of the author's poverty. Bloomfield's direct vision as a rural poet closely familiar with the country things of which he wrote was clouded by his straining after literary effect. When, within the limits of his own ability, he wrote as a farm worker, the cultivated mannerisms of poetic diction were kept at a distance, even if he achieved no personal distinction of language:

> The trudging sow leads forth her numerous young,
> Playful, and white, and clean

in search of fallen acorns. The exactness of 'trudging' gives the line a sense of actuality which is refreshing but only intermittent in Bloomfield's verbal pictures. He was often seduced into using cultured phraseology foreign to his own talent and consequently in a false key: thus, pigs become 'restless wand'ring tenants of the STY'; as the wind blows down the acorns, 'bright from their cups the rattling treasure falls'; the pigs drink from 'the welcome margin of some rush-grown pool' which Bloomfield quickly elaborates into a 'little lake' with a 'calm bosom'; after the pigs have been frightened away by a disturbed duck, 'Night's dark reign restores their wonted peace'.

Rogers continued into the third decade of the nineteenth century the mode in poetry that Wordsworth had set out to discredit in *Lyrical Ballads* two years before the century began. On the other hand Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*, written too soon to have been marked by any Wordsworthian influence, shows in its mixed kind that an impulse towards naturalism was moving in the spirit of the age, however much it might be hampered by lingering fashion and the drag of critical orthodoxy which made the Romantics for many years the butt of reviewers.

Wordsworth

In its effect, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Wordsworth and Coleridge was more a disintegrating than a revolutionary book. It slowly crumbled the foundations of the Classical school while the conservative opposition was busy defending the superstructure. It might indeed be said that it crumbled foundations already crumbling. It is improbable that the old superstructure would have stood even if no Wordsworth had appeared, for the

work of the pre-Romantics—Blake and others—could not have been without ultimate major influence; nor can it be supposed that, in the absence of a Wordsworth, Romanticism would not have swept in with power in the next generation through Shelley and Keats. If *Lyrical Ballads* could now be examined anew without the advantage of historical hindsight, most of Wordsworth's contributions might be thought to display little fundamental change of poetic direction. The brief 1798 Preface anticipated that readers might think that 'the author has sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity', but in fact he used little of 'the language of conversation in the . . . lower classes of society', and eighteenth-century poetic diction lingers: 'verdant herb', 'balmy night', 'vernal showers', 'May's dewy prime', 'the equinoctial deep', and so on. When the language is simplified it is often only an intellectualist's simplification without true simplicity, as in 'We are Seven', where 'the little Maid', an eight-year-old cottage girl, is made to babble throughout with oily precocity: e.g.

> And often after sunset, Sir,
> When it is light and fair,
> I take my little porringer,
> And eat my supper there.

'I was well aware', Wordsworth wrote in the Preface to later editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800; 1802), that 'by those who should dislike them they would be read with more than common dislike', though he found a greater number pleased than he had ventured to hope. Beyond simplicity, and with more success, his aim was to produce poetry 'well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations'. This 'moral relations' factor and an early determination to be, as poet, 'a teacher or nothing' have too much diverted attention from the frequency with which Wordsworth named 'pleasure' and excitement and enjoyment as sensations which poetry should arouse: 'the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which [man] knows and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure. . . . We have no knowledge . . . but what had been built up by pleasure, and

exists in us by pleasure alone. . . . The end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure. . . .'[1] A progressive degrading of the notion of pleasure, until it connotes scarcely more than a trivial titillation of the senses, has obscured the nobler and more rewarding conception of pleasure as a channel of experience profitable to man's whole personality. While Wordsworth's ideal of pleasure was an intellectual-spiritual one, it was neither bodiless nor excessively metaphysical, for the enjoyment of such pleasure is accompanied by a sense of well-being in proportion to the individual capacity for registering experience. The greatness of Wordsworth's successful poetry lies in its power to give acute pleasure by stimulating the reader's imagination to the pitch where he perceives with the freshness and wonder of a new creature in a new world; and this power is the more extraordinary inasmuch as it is generated through meditation upon familiar and frequently commonplace things. Coleridge, on the contrary, wove cunning verbal spells and had a genie's gift of transportation: his best poetry is a magic carpet from which glimpses may be caught of a land we know, but it is bound on a journey beyond space and time. This is Coleridge's miracle. Yet Wordsworth's miracle of the commonplace serves mankind better, or can so serve those who do not harbour the conviction that nothing magical or miraculous awaits revelation in the commonplace, a fallacy as absurd as any presumption that the supreme commonplace of sunlight is incapable of the manifold miracle of colour.

Too much can and has been made of two assertions by Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads* Preface: (1) that he 'endeavoured to bring [his] language near to the real language of men'; (2) that poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity'.

Wordsworth's choice and use of words was in conscious and deliberate dissent from Thomas Gray's dictum that poetry 'has a language peculiar to itself';[2] but the opening lines of the Preface point to the crux of the matter, in the words here italicized: '*by fitting to metrical arrangement* a selection of the real language of men *in a state of vivid sensation*'. No veil would have

[1] See Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800 edn.) for these and related passages.
[2] Letter to Richard West, April 1742.

been lifted from the commonplace if Wordsworth's language had itself been uniformly commonplace in movement, tone, and temperature. 'The real language of men', when fitted to metrical arrangement or expressing a state of vivid sensation, becomes language as rarely used. Only when words are brought under æsthetic control in their associations and rhythms and charged with 'the essential passions of the heart' can they perform the evocative functions of poetry.

The supposition that 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is emotion wrung dry is a disabling handicap to appreciation of Wordsworth. Emotion immediately expressed is as raw as wine newly bottled: the cultivated palate rejects it. Tranquil contemplation of an emotional occasion matures the feeling and sensation, deepening and refining whatever is not engulfed in the extravagant responses of the passionate moment, and distinguishing genuine emotion from shallow turbulence. The unagitated surface of Wordsworth's poetry demonstrates depth of controlled emotion, not absence nor enfeeblement of emotion. It combines an essentially classical restraint with a uniquely sensitive capacity for emotional response which extends from human affairs outward to nature, sentient and inanimate. The sonnet 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' (1802) is saturated with the quiet of early morning, yet it also pulsates with feeling as strongly and steadily as healthy arteries with blood:

> . . . The City now doth, like a garment, wear
> The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
> Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
> Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
> All bright and glistening in the smokeless air.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
> And all that mighty heart is lying still.

On this, as on other occasions which bore fruit in the work of her brother, or in that of Coleridge, Dorothy Wordsworth was by the poet's side and the scene has its prose counterpart in her *Journal* (31 July 1802): 'The city, St. Paul's, with the river and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung

by their cloud of smoke, and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light, that there was even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles.' The influence of Dorothy and William upon each other, and the nature of their relationship, has been much dwelt upon, but the presence of a tragic element of consciously suppressed passion was not overtly and fully examined nor its critical bearing upon Wordsworth's poetry discussed until 1954.[1] Their devotion had been assumed to be nothing but mutually beneficial, with an overplus to the brother's advantage:

> The Blessing of my later years
> Was with me when a boy
> She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
> And love, and thought, and joy.[2]

That, while the life of Wordsworth the man was long, all that is excellent in his poetry was the product of a single decade is strange but not in itself necessarily mysterious. Elderly, even aged, poets have produced great works, yet poetry is more commonly the product of fermenting experience in younger men. When Wordsworth wrote in *The Prelude* (Book XI, 108–9)

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
> But to be young was very heaven!

he recollected the sensations of a particular experience, but the mood is that of the ecstasy which informs all great poetry. He began to compose verses while still a schoolboy, and was twenty-eight when *Lyrical Ballads* appeared with poems written by him during the past ten years. 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13. 1798', the concluding piece in *Lyrical Ballads*, was the first of his unquestionable works of genius, and by the middle of 1805 he had finished his greatest sustained work, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind.* In the remaining

[1] See *Wordsworth—A Re-interpretation*, by F. W. Bateson (Longmans, London, 1954).

[2] 'The Sparrow's Nest' (written in 1801).

forty-five years of his life he wrote nothing that affects his reputation as a poet, while in numerous revisions of the earlier writings he emasculated, smoothed, and diluted much that the ageing Wordsworth disapproved in the utterances of his younger self.[1] There is no other case in literary history where, in the eyes of posterity, a poet's fame has been so burdened by the weight of his own later years: upon the shoulders of the eager young poet sits the fixed image of 'the lost leader',[2] though an attentive weighing of the evidence may suggest that the image is at least in part a phantom.[3]

Wordsworth's years of disturbance began in childhood. He was born at Cockermouth in Cumberland on 7 April 1770, the son of Lord Lonsdale's agent. The death of his mother when he was eight threw him into the unsympathetic charge of her parents, the Cooksons, who kept a draper's shop in Penrith. He passed wholly under their control when his father died five years later, and it is significant that whereas *The Prelude* speaks much of other scenes and episodes of his childhood there is no mention of his grandparents. There are many instances in the lives of writers (e.g. Dickens, Bernard Shaw, Kipling) of painful experiences in early years being shuttered away without diminishing their long-term critical effect. Wordsworth's passing allusion to 'all the terrors, all the early miseries' and the 'severer interventions' which, among other influences, contributed to the formation of his mind signifies by the extreme force of its reticence an unhealed memory of the Penrith days. The humiliations of that time were explicitly described by his sister Dorothy in a letter to a friend after her return in 1787 from Halifax, where she had lived happily for the nine years following Mrs. Wordsworth's death.

Wordsworth had the main part of his schooling at Hawkshead, under a headmaster who encouraged his talent for versifying; but Nature was by far the strongest educative influence upon him during the years from 1775 until he left Penrith for

[1] In *The Poet Wordsworth* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1950) Helen Darbishire examines the changes made by the author in *The Prelude* between the original (1805) text and the first published (1850) version.

[2] Browning's poem with this title has been supposed to refer to Wordsworth.

[3] See *The Later Wordsworth* by Edith C. Batho (Cambridge University Press, 1933), an only partially convincing essay in exculpation.

St. John's College, Cambridge, in the autumn of 1787. Personifying the river Derwent, he wrote (*The Prelude*,[1] I, 290 ff.):

> He was a Playmate whom we dearly lov'd,
> Oh! many a time have I, a five years' Child
> A naked Boy, in one delightful Rill,
> A little Mill-race sever'd from his stream,
> Made one long bathing of a summer's day,
> Bask'd in the sun, and plunged, and bask'd again . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
> Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear; . . .

The spirit of mountains, lakes, and rivers entered into him so powerfully as to become, even while he was scarcely out of infancy, Nature-possession and, soon, mystical identification with Nature.

> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, . . . (I, 329–30)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> the huge Cliff
> Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
> With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
> Strode after me . . . (I, 409–12)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> huge and mighty Forms that do not live
> Like living men mov'd slowly through the mind
> By day and were the trouble of my dreams. (I, 425–7)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . I would stand,
> Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
> Thence did I drink the visionary power. (II, 326–30)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . at length
> From Nature and her overflowing soul
> I had receiv'd so much that all my thoughts
> Were steep'd in feeling; I was only then
> Contented when with bliss ineffable
> I felt the sentiment of Being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still . . .

[1] All references are to the 1805 text.

> . . . in all things now
> I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
> One song they sang, and it was audible,
> Most audible then when the fleshly ear . . .
> Forgot its functions, and slept undisturb'd.
>
> (II, 415–21; 429–32, 434)

Though Wordsworth made friends at Cambridge and took some share in its convivial undergraduate life, he appears to have made no deep impression on his contemporaries, and there is little to amplify the subjective record in Book III of *The Prelude*, 'Residence at Cambridge'. He graduated at the beginning of 1791 and but for his lack of years would have entered the ministry and settled in a country parsonage. That was still his intention when he set out for Orleans via Dieppe and Paris in November 1891 to improve his French, preparatory to working as a tutor until he was twenty-three and qualified to take Holy Orders. During some weeks of walking in France and Switzerland in the preceding year he had coolly observed the people's enthusiasm for the Revolution. Now, on his second visit, which was prolonged until late in 1792, he was himself caught up in revolutionary fervour through his friendship with a young republican officer, Michel Armand Beaupuy,[1] at Orleans; and in Paris from October to December he mixed with members of the revolutionist clubs. *The Prelude* is again the source for a personal account of the growth and the subsequent decay of his sympathy with the new order in France.

When he was sixteen Wordsworth had fallen in love with an unidentified Mary who lived beside Esthwaite Water. Although he appears to have struck some who knew him as sexless, the facts—and comments by those well informed—give convincing evidence of his susceptibility and potency, though not necessarily of passion. Readers to whom Wordsworth had been presented as a pattern of virtue were disconcerted—many were shocked and resentful—when, after more than a century, it became general knowledge that in France Annette Vallon, daughter of an Orleans barber-surgeon, had borne him a child,[2] christened Anne Caroline Wordsworth in Orleans

[1] Wordsworth misnames him Beaupuis (*The Prelude*, IX, 424).

[2] See *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon*, by Émile Legouis (Dent, London, 1922).

Cathedral on 15 December 1792. The affair was known to Dorothy Wordsworth (also to a few others in England), and there is ground for assuming that Wordsworth intended to marry Annette. That he did not return to her may have been due to the outbreak of war with France, or to a mutual recognition that they were not suited for permanent relationship. Since the episode could neither be omitted entirely from *The Prelude* nor declared in plain terms, Wordsworth incorporated it (IX, 549–933) as

> a tragic Tale
> Not in its spirit singular indeed
> But haply worth memorial, as I heard
> The events related by my patriot Friend
> And others who had borne a part therein.

Published separately in 1820 as 'Vaudracour and Julia' (and not included in the 1850 version of *The Prelude*) the tale is an uneasy combination of genuine emotion and sentimental romantic fiction. Deplorably, Wordsworth shunned the great opportunity to let his own heart speak naturally in terms of young love.

Though his fathering of an illegitimate daughter did not of itself turn Wordsworth's mind from the prospect of a respectable curacy, he was disowned by the uncle, Canon Cookson, to whom he had looked for introduction to the Church. No means of livelihood being apparent he started (1793) on a walking tour in southern England with and at the expense of a former school friend, William Calvert, until Calvert left him to complete the excursion alone. The problem of an income and a settled home was solved in 1795 when Raisley Calvert left him £900, and other friends provided a house at Racedown in Dorset which he shared with Dorothy until they moved to Alfoxden in Somerset two years later. The legacy, the house, and the beginning of his friendship with Coleridge, made the year 1795 as important to English poetry as it was comforting to Wordsworth. Coleridge is the 'dear, dear Friend', the 'beloved Friend', addressed in *The Prelude* (he was in a measure its begetter, if the note made long after, 21 July 1832,[1] is an

[1] See *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 188.

accurate recollection); from their contact of mind and imagination came the Wordsworthian and uniquely Coleridgean 'Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'; they were, until Coleridge's disorderly living estranged the two men, 'three persons and one soul'.

It would be beside the present purpose to track Wordsworth's movements through his tours of the Continent, Scotland, and Ireland, or his visitings in England. From Alfoxden, he and Dorothy moved to Dove Cottage, Grasmere, in 1799, and in 1813 Rydal Mount became their permanent home. He married Mary Hutchinson, a friend from childhood, in 1802; in 1813 and until his resignation in 1842 (when he received a Civil List pension of £300) he was Stamp-Distributor for Westmorland; he became Poet Laureate in 1843, and died on 23 April 1850. Later in that year his heavily revised version of *The Prelude* was published, the title having been supplied by his widow.

The several poems known as the 'Lucy' group, written in 1799, are perplexing inasmuch as the identity of Lucy remains the subject of speculation or guesswork.[1] They are among the best-known and best-liked of Wordsworth's lyrics ('Strange fits of passion have I known'; 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways'; 'I travelled among unknown men'; 'Three years she grew in sun and shower'; 'A slumber did my spirit seal'), and the enjoyment of them as beautiful poems has been reinforced for generations of readers by the pathos which can be read into them as laments for a loved one lost by death. Bateson,[2] however, holds that Lucy symbolizes Dorothy and he associates the poems with 'the crisis with which Wordsworth found himself confronted in 1798 . . . the discovery that he and Dorothy were falling in love with each other'. He advances the theory 'that the dangerous relationship with Dorothy was now solved, subconsciously, by killing her off symbolically. Lucy who had been loved so dearly, was dead. The guilty possibilities were evaded by the removal, subconsciously, of the guilty object.' Despite an instinctive wish to refute this theory, the relevant passages in

[1] H. M. Margoliouth in *Wordsworth and Coleridge 1795–1834* (Home University Library, London, 1953) argues that Lucy was Margaret Hutchinson (younger sister of Wordsworth's future wife) who died in 1796.

[2] op. cit.

Dorothy's Grasmere *Journal* cannot lightly be swept aside. The account of her feelings on the day of William's marriage,[1] for all its restraint, is agonized by something deeper than a possessive sister's jealousy. It is a reluctant expression of tragic torment, and the misery of the situation is compensated by the protagonists' inflexible resistance. Moralists may read it as the triumph of virtue; psychologists as a feat of sublimation. Bateson considers that Wordsworth's greatest poems are the product of his determination to 'solve his personal crisis . . . by eliminating every other human being except himself from his emotional life', and that when he succeeded in this and resolved the 'psychological tensions' the impulse to great poetry had vanished.

Whether these are supportable theories or wild fantasies Wordsworth's existing works are neither worsened nor bettered by them. The poetry remains poetry for enjoyment and enlightenment. It is ironical that notwithstanding his concern to bring simple people into his poems and to use their language, he failed to attract such people as readers. He was, as Coleridge perceived, essentially a philosophical poet—but one who extended philosophy beyond mere thought processes; his great gifts lay in the sweep and penetrating power of his intellectual imagination and in his unmatched ability to express

> sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood and felt along the heart.

In the early poem from which these lines come, 'Tintern Abbey', he was already adding profusely to the English store of unforgettable lines, and was not so much 'interpreting' Nature as communicating a new order of experience[2] for which Nature serves as a point of departure. It is among the recognition signs of a genuinely great poet that even his most familiar lines are never staled by familiarity. They make their impact anew at every encounter; though the words remain the same their effect is infinitely variable. Sublimity is never less than sublime, and

[1] See *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, edited by E. de Selincourt (2 vols. Macmillan, London, 1941), Vol. I, p. 176.

[2] Cf. Hazlitt's dictum that through Wordsworth 'All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced. We begin *de novo* on a *tabula rasa* of poetry. (*The Spirit of the Age*. 1825.)

Wordsworth attained sublimity as surely as any poet, recognizing within himself

> a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

WE ARE SEVEN.

A simple Child, dear brother Tim,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

Though Wordsworth wrote much that is now seldom read, there is a good case for reading him complete, since his muse plodded with scarcely less distinction than she soared. There is little point in saying that Wordsworth was frequently dull; few great poets have escaped spells of dullness. But when Wordsworth was dull and commonplace it was, more often than not, with the dullness and commonplaceness that life on occasion imposes—periods of recuperation differing basically from the

dullness of bad art. Wordsworth put himself at Life's disposal, as the respondent tells Matthew in 'Expostulation and Reply':

> we can feed this mind of ours
> In a wise passiveness.
>
> Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
> Of things for ever speaking,
> That nothing of itself will come,
> But we must still be seeking?

And in the poem which followed this in *Lyrical Ballads*, 'The Tables Turned', he addresses a bookworm thus:

> Close up those barren leaves;
> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receives.

The wisely passive mind and the watchful receiving heart were the channels of Wordsworth's inspiration, necessarily unselective channels which let through quantities of silt that a self-consciously busy mind would have dredged away. But when the channels were running crystal clear, as they were for the 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', the most perfect of his poems, there is not only an amazing surge of spontaneity but also a beautiful sense of spiritual and intellectual buoyancy and illumination that gives verbal wings even to lines that register the loss of childhood visions:

> The Rainbow comes and goes,
> And lovely is the Rose,
> The Moon doth with delight
> Look round her when the heavens are bare,
> Waters on a starry night
> Are beautiful and fair;
> The sunshine is a glorious birth;
> But yet I know, where'er I go,
> That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

For the glory that had passed away there were the compensating 'years that bring the philosophic mind':

> Though inland far we be,
> Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither. . . .

In this great ode Wordsworth achieved a unified masterpiece which is at once a superb work of poetic art and the supreme timeless song of innocence and experience.

He was never again to approach that height, and by that standard most of his other writings are inferior and the remainder only fragmentarily excellent. But how excellent in their moments they are. His sonnets are not shamed even by those of Milton, whose poetry he admired and loved. If in other poems he never approaches Miltonic majesty, he frequently touches the heart as Milton rarely does. And in *The Prelude* he wrote an autobiographical epic, with dull patches indeed, yet no patch so dull that it can be passed over without loss to the whole effect, and with many lines in which the blank verse assumes an exquisite lyrical note—

> . . . the whole Earth,
> The beauty wore of promise—that which sets . . .
> The budding rose above the rose full blown.

Even in that derided, often flaccid, work of laborious application, *The Excursion*, there are embedded treasures for the patient excavator. Finally, of himself, it is well to see him through Hazlitt's eyes: 'Mr. Wordsworth, in his person, is above the middle size, with marked features and an air somewhat stately and quixotic. He reminds one of some of Holbein's heads: grave, saturnine, with a slight indication of sly humour, kept under by the manners of the age or by the pretensions of the person. He has a peculiar sweetness in his smile, and great depth and manliness and a rugged harmony in the tones of his voice.'

Coleridge

The spread of scholastic education in the present century has bred a proliferating race of literary archæologists whose grubbing among the shards of authorship threatens to bury poetry and creative prose under towering heaps of academic rubble. Genuine appreciation of literature, and more especially true apprehension of poetry, can come only by way of immediate communication between creator and reader—between the dynamo and the lamp. Formal criticism and analytical scholarship may help to clean and polish the lamp-glass or at

best to serve as a conductor, but they cannot provide the current required for genuine illumination. To rediscover and restore stone by stone the generating station and the plant that housed and drove the dynamo satisfies a certain low human curiosity, but it does not account for nor 'explain' either poetry or any other product of the high imagination.

Coleridge has been particularly subjected to the scholarly spade and trowel since John Livingstone Lowes showed[1] that an inquiry into the genesis of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan', less than 700 lines of poetry, could be extended through nearly as many large pages of literary detection. It is fair to recognize *The Road to Xanadu* as a masterpiece in its kind, so long as the kind is recognized as basically absurd. It tracks down the many sources that Coleridge drew upon through his omnivorous reading (he described himself as 'a literary cormorant', adding 'I am *deep* in all out of the way books') and displays the innumerable borrowings of ideas and even phrases from other men's writings which stirred the poet's transmuting imagination. This partial type of inquiry is in essence no more valuable, however, than a factual answer to Browning's ironical question 'What porridge had John Keats?' would be. A poet is a poet: we can say little more towards an elucidation of the mystery of poetry, unless perchance—concurrently with the study of a poet's reading, i.e. his consumption of mental nutriment—we consider also his feeding habits—his absorption of the physical nutriment which aids if not determines the functioning of mind and imagination.

Since the human imagination was working at full throttle in the greatest of Coleridge's poems, the pedestrian trend of modern criticism is momentous in relation to his work. Livingstone Lowes advanced a routine apologia for the kind of investigation he carried out. Having said that 'when, as in "The Ancient Mariner", the stuff that Professors and Doctors are made on has been distilled into quintessential poetry, then the passing miracle of creation has been performed', he continues:

> But 'creation', like 'creative', is one of those hypnotic words which are prone to cast a spell upon the understanding and dissolve our thinking into haze. And out of this nebulous state of

[1] See *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Houghton Mifflin, New York; Constable, London; 1927).

> the intellect springs a strange but widely prevalent idea. The shaping spirit of imagination sits aloof, like God as he is commonly conceived, creating in some thaumaturgic fashion out of nothing its visionary world. That and that only is deemed to be 'originality' . . . But there are those of us who cherish the invincible belief that the glory of poetry will gain, not lose, through a recognition of the fact that the imagination works its wonders through the exercise, in the main, of normal and intelligible powers. To establish that, without blinking the ultimate mystery of genius, is to bring the workings of the shaping spirit in the sphere of art within the circle of the great moulding forces through which in science and affairs and poetry alike, there emerges from chaotic multiplicity a unified and ordered world.

What Livingstone Lowes does in fact demonstrate is not that 'the imagination works its wonders through the exercise . . . of normal and intelligible powers' (which it assuredly does not) but that the imagination customarily works upon normal and intelligible material. It 'works its wonders' only through the presence of some abnormal, or supra-normal, power—genius—which transmutes the 'normal' material into the perfected work of art. Modern criticism, fettered by the untenable assumption that the imagination can be interpreted by the intellect, burrows in the cellarage while the creative forces of literature are active overhead. And if 'creation' and 'creative' are to be barred as suspect hypnotic words, nothing will be gained in clarity if the alternative is to be abstract jargon such as 'the great moulding forces through which, in science and affairs and poetry alike, there emerges from chaotic multiplicity a unified and ordered world', twenty-three words which 'dissolve our thinking into haze' and for which the single word *genius* suffices without pretension.

The 'meaning'[1] of poetry is in itself and is self-communicating to those who are fit for, i.e. receptive or attuned to, poetry. Many students—and teachers—of literature are not, in this present sense, fit for poetry, and it is among those that textual criticism and its analogues and off-shoots have struck choking roots. Unless poetry is first apprehended *as* poetry, unless the imaginative link between poet and reader is instantaneously

[1] 'Meaning' in relation to poetry is an inapposite intellectual word. The exact phrase would be 'the *poetry* of poetry is in itself. . . .'

created, the mechanical aids of scholarship are unproductive. If the imaginative link is in being, if he knows by the grace of God *what poetry is* and responds within himself to *what poetry does*, the reader may then proceed as a strictly intellectual exercise to inquire what any particular poem *means*. But it would be barren folly or worse for anyone who had not first been enraptured by their magic to attempt an intellectual approach to 'The Ancient Mariner' or 'Kubla Khan', or to probe into the contents of the library that furnished raw material to the poet. The supposition that inability or disinclination to analyse or paraphrase a poem necessarily signifies mental inertia is a scholastic delusion. Moreover, the performance of such pieces of mental gymnastic degrades poetry, and may be the shortest way to destroy a nascent love. Poetry integrates beauty, truth, and wisdom: it creates its own 'unified and ordered world', whereas the analytical study of poetry as a primary rather than a secondary and subsidiary exercise disintegrates unity and order into 'chaotic multiplicity', thus totally reversing the claim made by Livingstone Lowes in the passage quoted above.

In Coleridge's experience the struggle between imagination and intellectual speculation produced its own chaos and the early destruction of creative power. Though more of his poetry is worthy than common repute suggests, and though his *Biographia Literaria* and miscellaneous prose contain many fine passages and much scattered wisdom, his place among the greatest writers was settled by one poem and two fragments, written mainly inside a twelvemonth—1797–8, when he was twenty-five. The opium habit contracted in 1796 has been regarded alternatively as the vital stimulant to his imagination and as the destroying agent of his will power, but it is all too easy to make an extravagant assessment of its influence. Both as a stimulant and as a depressant it probably did no more than accent temporarily the innate gifts and weaknesses which would in any circumstances have marked him out as a genius subdued by a procrastinating and dissipating temperament. He was immobilized in a realm of unrealized projects. The poems he intended and listed by themes or titles far outnumber those he wrote: 'he has only to draw the sliders of his imagination', said Hazlitt, 'and a thousand subjects expand before

him . . . he revolves in his wayward soul, or utters to the passing wind, or discourses to his own shadow . . . and so has sunk into torpid uneasy repose, tantalized by vain imaginings, his lips idly moving, but his heart for ever still, or, as the shattered chords vibrate of themselves, making melancholy music to the ear of memory!' His poetic imagination, apart from its solitary fruitful season was made barren by his restless mind, 'pitching his tent upon the barren waste without, and having no abiding place nor city of refuge!'

Hazlitt's essay was published in 1825, when the early splendours of the Romantic Revival were fully quenched. Byron had died the year before, having survived Shelley by some two years, and Keats by three. Wordsworth had another quarter of a century of life ahead, Coleridge almost a decade, but as poets both were moribund before Keats was out of infancy.

The son of a dissenting minister, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) was born at Ottery St. Mary, Devon, and schooled at Christ's Hospital (then in Newgate Street in the City of London), where Charles Lamb was his particular friend.[1] He went on to Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1791, and at the end of 1793 for no evident reason enlisted as a private soldier, under an assumed name. After his brothers bought him out of the army a few months later he returned to Cambridge, and in the same year (1794) met Southey, with whom and others he evolved a plan for a Utopian community, Pantisocracy (in which all were to be equal and all were to rule), which they proposed to set up in America on the bank of the Susquehanna. The scheme came to nothing, and in 1795 Coleridge married Sarah Fricker, Southey's sister-in-law. A newspaper he started in 1796 having ceased after a few issues, he drifted around England, giving occasional lectures and preaching in Unitarian churches until, in 1798, members of the Wedgwood (pottery) family provided an annuity sufficient to enable him to settle as a writer.

In 1794 Coleridge had contributed a 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' to an edition of the Rowley poems,[2] and in 1796 he published *Poems on Various Subjects*, described later as 'Juvenile Poems': 'Satisfied that the thoughts, such as they were, could not have been expressed otherwise, or at least

[1] See below, pp. 121–2. [2] See Ward: II, p. 217.

more perspicuously, I forgot to inquire, whether the thoughts themselves did not demand a degree of attention unsuitable to the nature and objects of poetry.'[1] Strongly influenced by the *Fourteen Sonnets* (1789) of the Rev. William Lisle Bowles (1762–1850), he began his own first sonnet 'My heart has thank'd thee, Bowles!' and speaks of them as a solace after 'youth's gay prime'

> . . . when the mightier throes of mind began,
> And drove me forth, a thought-bewildered man!

The Devil's Walk by Professor Porson

The thought-bewilderment which pursued Coleridge throughout was alleviated when his friendship with Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth began at Nether Stowey in 1797. A threefold affection grew between them and its beneficent influence extended from their personal lives outward to the subsequent enrichment of English poetry. Coleridge

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, ch. I.

recorded, nearly twenty years afterwards, that in the early months of their acquaintance their

> conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. . . . The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence arrived at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. . . . For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.
>
> In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; . . .[1]

Wordsworth's industry, Coleridge goes on to say, outstripped his; hence *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) had only three poems by him ('The Ancient Mariner', 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', and 'Lewti; or the Circassian Love Chant'[2]) to twenty by Wordsworth. In the same year, however, very shortly before the joint volume was issued, Coleridge had published a book of poems which included 'Fears in Solitude', 'France: An Ode', and 'Frost at Midnight', following his *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796). 'France' laments, as Wordsworth's *The Prelude* does at

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, ch. XIV.

[2] 'Lewti' appeared in the Bristol issue of the first edition. In the London issue of the same edition Coleridge's 'The Nightingale' was substituted.

greater length, the failure of the Revolution to uphold the ideal of Liberty; 'Fears in Solitude' was written in the spring of 1798 when a French invasion of Britain was expected. Both in vocabulary and in metrical movement these pieces are formal and stiff, though occasional lines in 'Fears in Solitude'—e.g.

> . . . fresh and delicate
> As . . . the unripe flax,
> When, through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,
> The level sunshine glimmers with green light

—are the product of a fresh and direct vision; while 'Frost at Midnight', where the sleeping child and the solitary poet are enclosed in silence, ends with the beautiful picture of the falling eave-drops 'heard only in the trances of the blast',

> Or if the secret ministry of frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
> Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

Wordsworth reported that the two poets, besides undertaking a joint volume, agreed to collaborate in writing a poem based on a dream by a friend of Coleridge about one suffering under a curse after committing an unspecified crime. Wordsworth, who, like Coleridge, was a great reader of travel books, took the shooting of an albatross from *A Voyage Round the World by the Way of the Great South Sea, Performed in the Years 1719–22 in the Speedwell of London*, by Captain George Shelvocke (1726). The attempt to write the poem together failed because they 'pulled different ways', and Wordsworth contributed only a few lines to 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', which filled the opening pages of *Lyrical Ballads*, where it was printed without the marginal glosses supplied by Coleridge when he included it years later in his collected poems, with some of its original archaisms removed and with a number of textual revisions which were unquestionable improvements: e.g. the second line of

> The horned Moon, with one bright Star
> Almost atween the tips

became

> Within the nether tip.

No other poem in English creates so completely and indispensably its own atmosphere and order of being, or so merges the world of sense and simplicity with the other-world of mystery and profundity. It embodies the obverse and reverse of human experience in its interchanges of divinity and devilry, sin and redemption, beauty and horror, and in its employment of visual and aural material with exact effect. The living and the dead; water, air, and fire; the roaring wind and the unwhispering sea; the threat of the spectre-ship and the reassurance of the church on the hill; the Mariner with his skinny hand and glittering eye and the Bride, 'red as a rose': all have their place within the compass of the whole design.

Coleridge's own account of the origin of 'Kubla Khan' is among the most familiar of all literary anecdotes. During an illness in the summer of 1797 he retired to a farmhouse in Devon, between Lynton and Porlock, and under the influence of a prescribed anodyne fell asleep as he was reading a passage in *Purchas his Pilgrimage* relating to Kubla Khan, who 'commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed within a wall.' While sleeping for about three hours (he wrote in the introduction to 'Kubla Khan') 'he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things'. On waking he began to write down the dream poem, but was 'called out by a person on business from Porlock' and the vision faded, leaving only the fifty-four-line fragment, 'Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream', a piece of pure incantation which could hardly have been brought to a full close even if there had been no caller from Porlock. It does in truth, as it exists, cast its own conclusive spell:

> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.

'Christabel' (written partly in 1797 and resumed in 1800; published with 'Kubla Khan' in 1816) is another of Coleridge's uncompleted projects, though its two parts run to nearly 700 lines. A romantic narrative poem, it is more remarkable

for incidental beauties than for total effect: it tends to cloy with romantic excess. Yet Coleridge's genius, however intermittently it worked in 'Christabel', never produced lovelier lines than 'the Spring comes slowly up this way' and

> There is not wind enough to twirl
> The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

He started a weekly 'literary, moral, and political' periodical, *The Friend*, in 1809 and after its cessation in the next year reissued it in volume form with additional matter (1812; revised 1818). He lectured on Shakespeare and other poets at the Royal Institution in London, and his posthumously published *Notes and Lectures on Shakespeare* (1849)[1] have had a marked influence on more recent literary criticism. But *Biographia Literaria* (1817), his outstanding prose work, gives the most valuable statement of his conception of poetry and the function of the poet. Among its many passages with a ring of finality, none is more relevant to Coleridge himself than this:

> The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetical and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination.

Southey and Landor

Except as an early biographer of Nelson (1814), little is now heard of Robert Southey (1774–1843), voluminous as poet and as prose writer, who has shared the fate of a number of Poets Laureate in joining the army of the unread. He was in his lifetime one of the most prominent of the Wordsworth generation, and only personal animosity occluded Byron's admiration of Southey's lengthy narrative poems, which included *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), and *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1813). These belong to an outmoded genre which it is now impossible to revive, and in so

[1] See below, pp. 117–18.

far as Southey's verse may continue to be read at all, attention will be limited to a few shorter pieces, lighter in character, such as 'Bishop Hatto and the Rats' and 'After Blenheim', though the latter displays too patently Southey's lack of the agile wit and delicacy of touch which irony requires if it is not to decline into sarcasm. He accepted the Laureateship in 1813 after Scott had refused it.

Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), perhaps Southey's greatest admirer, is saved from oblivion by a handful of brief lyrics and by the *Imaginary Conversations* (1824–9), written in a studiously dignified and near-classical style. Admirable though they are as display pieces in prose, as dialogues they lack life, for Landor had no dramatic gift and was unable to clothe his mind in the diversified verbal dress of the many persons, men and women, he introduced in the *Conversations*. Jeanne d'Arc speaks indistinguishably from Agnes Sorel; Bothwell and Mary Queen of Scots are identical in tone. The names change but the minds and the voices are consistently Landor's. As a writer of verse epigrams and condensed lyrics, however, he has had no peer, unless it be Herrick; though Herrick's little songs are neat hedgerow posies beside the miniature plaited garlands of Landor:

Sweet Clementina, turn those eyes
On lines that trembling love has traced;
O steal one moment from the skies
With pity, as with beauty, graced.

So may the Virgin, ever blest,
Whate'er you hope, whate'er you do,
Rule o'er your pure and gentle breast,
And cast her tenderest smile on you.

Even in his most playfully charming moments he preserved an exquisite reticence and certainty of form:

From you, Ianthe, little troubles pass
Like little ripples down a sunny river;
Your pleasures spring like daisies in the grass,
Cut down, and up again as blithe as ever.

His long poem *Gebir* (1798) and his plays have passed from notice. He was notoriously irascible but far from unlikeable

and served as the original for Boythorn in Dickens's *Bleak House*. He has his own niche, relatively small but permanent, in literature: the learned will continue to admire him for the *Imaginary Conversations*, while a more general admiration will be stirred by his lyrics and epigrams, which have feeling as well as form.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRIPLE PEAK

Byron

Both in his life and in the temper of his writings Byron conforms snugly to the popular idea of the complete Romantic. As a handsome though physically-handicapped rebel-aristocrat, amorist, sentimentalist, cynic, libertarian, and soldier of fortune, with an audacious disregard of convention and authority and an expansive capacity for melodramatic self-dramatization tinged with self-pity and spiced by self-ridicule, he impressed himself deeply, through detestation as well as admiration, upon the consciousness of his own nation, and after his death he was exalted as a hero-genius by half Europe. He was so near to containing within himself the essence of the whole European Romantic movement, its extravagances no less than its soberer qualities, that without him the English Romantic Revival would make a pale insular showing against the livid continental background of storm and stress.

The normal English temperament reacts instinctively against the un-Englishness of Byron. Facile as poet and spectacularly flamboyant in person, he has been persistently charged with insincerity—a characteristic which even the most hypocritical Englishman finds it impossible to condone in others. Byron's 'insincerity' in his earlier poetry arose from his facility in emotion and in composition. He felt easily and in most relationships as easily unfelt; he wrote easily and passed on to write as easily again. The outcome was much apparently superficial and certainly technically slack verse, until exile strengthened his responses to experience and his deeper emotions and talent for satire found fuller engagement in *Don Juan.*

His wilder qualities had ancestral roots, for his father, Captain John Byron, was a man of easy morals, and the great-great-uncle from whom he inherited the title after the previous heir had been killed in battle was known as 'the wicked Lord

Byron'. The future poet, George Gordon Byron (1788–1824) was born in London of his father's second wife, a Scottish heiress (Catherine Gordon of Gight, Aberdeenshire) whose fortune her husband wasted before his death in 1791. Catherine Byron, by turns indulgent, tyrannical, and hysterical, took the boy to live in Aberdeen, where he started his formal education at the grammar school and owed much to his nurse, Mag Gray, from whom he got his extensive knowledge of the Bible. Although handicapped by a deformed foot he was physically active, particularly as a swimmer, and took considerable pride in later years in his feat of crossing the Hellespont from Sestos to Abydos in an hour and ten minutes (1810), emulating Leander though with no Hero to reward him.

Becoming the sixth baron when he was ten (1798), he went with his mother to live on the inherited estates at Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, and after further preparatory education at Dulwich spent four years at Harrow School (1801–5) before proceeding in 1805 to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated in 1808. He brought out his first collection of poems, *Hours of Idleness*, in 1807,[1] followed by *Poems on Various Occasions* (1807) and *Imitations and Translations* (1808). Harsh criticism of his verse in the *Edinburgh Review* led him to write *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) in which he attacked the editor, Francis Jeffrey, and also Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and others, though he afterwards acknowledged in a letter to Scott (12 January 1822) that 'you and Jeffrey and Leigh Hunt were the only literary men, of numbers whom I know (and some of whom I had served), who dared venture even an anonymous word in my favour' when (in Macaulay's phrase[2]) 'the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality' caused Byron to leave England.

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, judged by the standards of Dryden and Pope, is inferior satire. Byron came in due course to recognize (letter to John Murray, 15 September 1817) 'the ineffable distance in point of sense, harmony, effect, and even *Imagination*, passion, and *Invention*, between the little Queen Anne's man, and us of the Lower Empire', yet it was to Pope's

[1] His close friend John Cam Hobhouse had privately printed Byron's *Fugitive Pieces* the year before (1806).

[2] 'Essay on Byron', *Edinburgh Review*, June 1831.

12. Fanny Burney by E. F. Burney

13. Illustration from *Evelina* by Fanny Burney

14. Illustration by J. M. W. Turner to Roger's *Poems*

15. *Summer* from Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*

16. Illustration to Southey's *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*

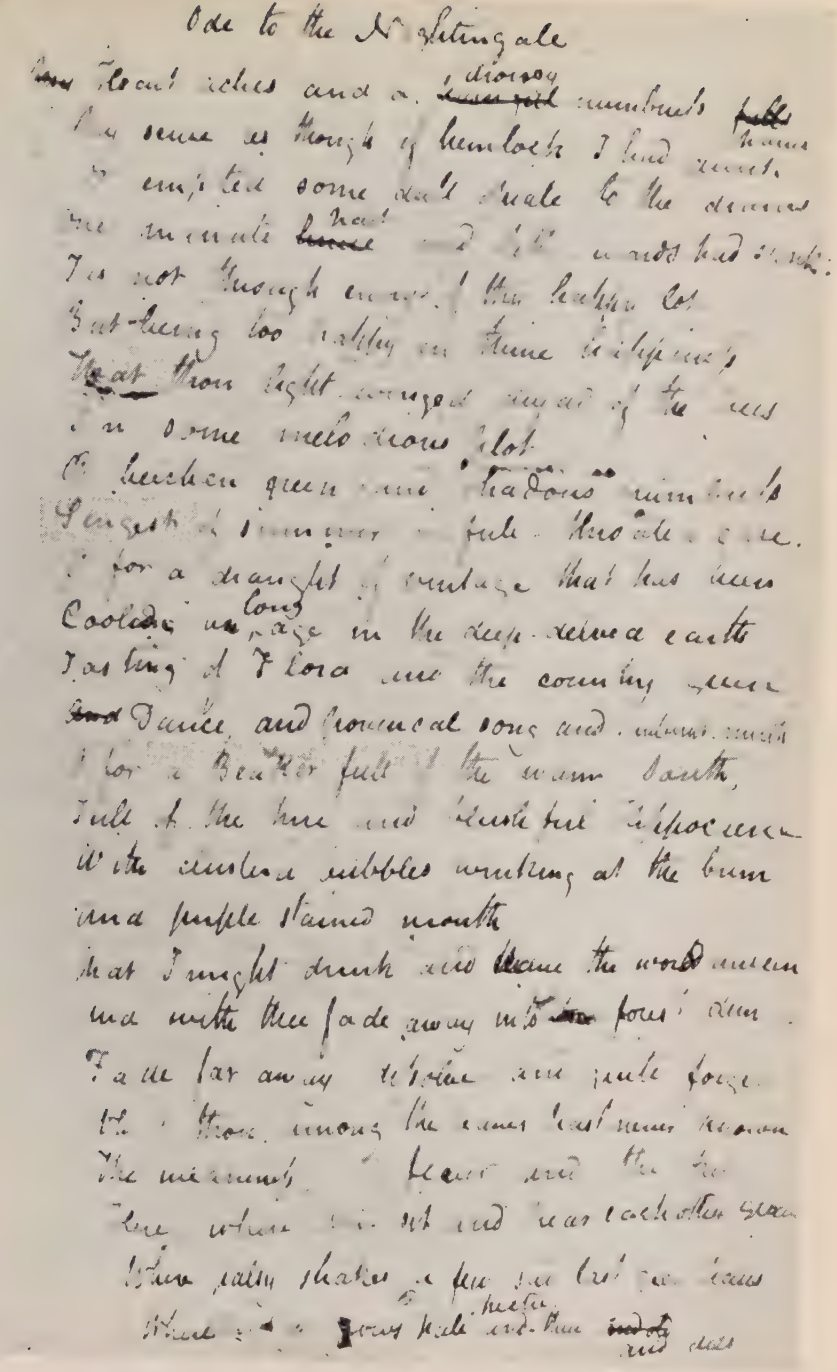
17. Illustration to Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*

18. Coleridge
by Peter Vandyke

19. Shelley
by Amelia Curran

20. Byron by G. Saunders

21 *Keats in His Study* by J. Severn



22. Manuscript of *Ode to a Nightingale* by Keats

23. Charles and Mary Lamb by F. S. Cary

24. Scene from *Macbeth* from Lamb's *Tales*

level that he aspired—'to such times our lingering looks are cast':

> Time was, ere yet in these degenerate days
> Ignoble themes obtain'd mistaken praise,
> When sense and wit with poesy allied,
> No fabled graces, flourish'd side by side;
> From the same fount their inspiration drew,
> And, rear'd by taste, bloom'd fairer as they grew.
> Then, in this happy isle, a Pope's pure strain
> Sought the rapt soul to charm, nor sought in vain;
> A polish'd nation's praise aspired to claim
> And raised the people's, as the poet's fame.
> Like him great Dryden pour'd the tide of song,
> In stream less smooth, indeed, yet doubly strong.

In respect of time Byron was born in exile, and in respect of place he died in exile. He was caught between two periods and belonged only imperfectly to either: the eighteenth century pulled against the nineteenth century in his poetry, but Byron's wit could not take the edge or the perfect polish imparted to Pope's lines by his mastery of language, nor had Byron the sense of 'something far more deeply interfused' that gave Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats the power to make words signify more than they say. Byron's serious defect as a poet—and for all his eminence the defect was crippling—lay in his inability to command a further dimension of language. His words say what they say, and they say no more. They have no additional power of suggestion; no illumination; no overtones or undertones; no mystery. What has often been interpreted as emotional insincerity in his verse is the less heinous but not less destructive fault of verbal inadequacy. The genuineness of his devotion to Greece and the Greek cause was beyond doubt, yet in what are probably the finest verses he wrote on that theme ('The Isles of Greece', incorporated in Canto III of *Don Juan*), the words, the lines, and the language in its entirety seem hardly more than a verbal veneer; e.g. (stanzas 3, 8, 16):

> The mountains look on Marathon—
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dream'd that Greece might still be free;

For standing on the Persians' grave,
I could not deem myself a slave.

. . . . . .

What, silent still? and silent all?
Ah! no;—the voices of the dead
Sound like a distant torrent's fall,
And answer, 'Let one living head,
But one arise,—we come, we come!'
'Tis but the living who are dumb.

. . . . . .

Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,
Where nothing save the waves and I
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die:
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!

Byron first visited Greece during his two years' European and Near Eastern tour in 1809–11, after taking his seat in the House of Lords. With the publication in March 1812 of Cantos I and II of *Childe Harold* he plunged immediately into the whirlpool of fame and notoriety that was to immerse him for the rest of his life. His mother had died in 1811; he was beset by the infatuated Lady Caroline Lamb—wife of the future Prime Minister and mentor of the young Queen Victoria, Lord Melbourne; he proposed unsuccessfully to the daughter of Sir Robert Milbanke in 1812, but was accepted two years later and married her in January 1815. The marriage lasted only until January 1816, when his wife left him, after the birth of their daughter, and a deed of separation was completed in April. Byron's eccentric behaviour and extravagance (he fell heavily into debt) gave ground for a charge of insanity lodged by his wife, but his association with Augusta Leigh the half-sister to whom he was passionately devoted brought him greater opprobrium, and from being the idol of society he dropped to the level of an outcast. He left England finally in April 1816, and passed his remaining eight years on the Continent, mainly in Italy, spending some time with Shelley, whose stepsister-in-law, Jane (Claire) Clairmont, bore a daughter, Allegra, to Byron. The most lasting of his amours was with the Countess Guiccioli, with whom he lived in Venice, Pisa, and Genoa between 1819

and 1823. Enthusiasm for all causes aiming at national independence made him revered among European political insurgents, and in 1823 he was elected to the Greek Committee formed to free Greece from Turkish rule. He joined them at Missolonghi in January 1824, determined to give financial and personal aid and to raise auxiliary forces in their support. He had little success in managing irregulars, however, and his health giving way, he died of malaria at Missolonghi on 19 April.

The writing of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was begun in Albania in 1809 during his first tour. Following up the immense success of Cantos I and II (1812), Byron published Canto III in 1816 and Canto IV in 1818. Meanwhile, he had written copiously on other themes, producing exotic Eastern tales in verse—*The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Giaour* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814)—and other dramatic and narrative poems—e.g. *The Curse of Minerva* (1812), *The Siege of Corinth* (1816), *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), *The Lament of Tasso* (1817)—as well as shorter pieces in *Hebrew Melodies* (1815) and *Poems on his Domestic Circumstances* (1816).

For a generation which read narrative poetry as avidly as novels, *Childe Harold* had all the requisite ingredients for popularity. With a lingering element of gothic melancholy it combined autobiographical candour carried to the point of conscious posturing and audacious self-dramatization. It was at once confessionally world-weary of indulgences at home and gloriously descriptive of beauties and excitements abroad. Its rhetoric was magnificent, its interpolated songs delightful; and if it was often facile its unflagging verve, its glitter, and its sophistication compensated. Moreover, current history was there and patriotic hearts could swell to the stanzas on Waterloo (Canto III, 21–30). Whatever reservations of enthusiasm modern readers may make, few will find *Childe Harold* dull. Byron mastered the Spenserian stanza and used it with great dexterity, and he seldom recurred to the archaic touches introduced at the beginning:

> Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth,
> Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight. . . .

Nature he loved without fickleness from his childhood days in

Scotland, and the scenic passages are among the most durable in *Childe Harold*: of Greece (II, lxxxvii)

> Yet are thy skies as blue, thy crags as wild;
> Sweet are thy groves, and verdant are thy fields,
> Thine olive ripe as when Minerva smiled,
> And still his honey'd wealth Hymettus yields;
> There the blithe bee his fragrant fortress builds,
> The free born wanderer of thy mountain-air;
> Apollo still thy long, long summer gilds,
> Still in his beam Mendeli's marbles glare;
> Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair.

of the Lake of Geneva (III, lxxxvi)

> It is the hush of night, and all between
> Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,
> Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen,
> Save darken'd Jura, whose capt heights appear
> Precipitously steep; and drawing near,
> There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,
> Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear
> Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,
> Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more.

The descriptive style, however, is still akin to that of the eighteenth century.

Sir Walter Scott, when reviewing Canto III of *Childe Harold* in the *Quarterly Review* (October 1816), likened Byron's heroes in his verse tales to the robbers and corsairs in the mannerist paintings of Salvator Rosa, and said that 'in painting the sombre and the horrible, Lord Byron assumed in his fervour the very semblance of the characters he describes, like an actor who presents on the stage at once his own person and the tragic character with which for the time he is invested'. Scott emphasized, further, that all Byron's characters are one character, repeated again and again, though, curiously, without satiating contemporary public taste. Following the dramatic poem *Manfred* (1817) Byron published in 1820 the first of his several tragedies, *Marino Faliero*; *Sardanapulus*, *The Two Foscari* and *Cain*, all in 1821; and *Werner* in 1822. Attempts have been made from time to time to rehabilitate him as a playwright and to find neglected dramatic and stage qualities in his plays, but in truth he had only a meagre sense of the theatre and was no

more successful than other poets of the period in making the essential distinction between words for the stage and words for the page. Romantic rhetoric is not drama.

Whereas for *Childe Harold* Byron adopted the Spenserian stanza, for *Don Juan* he turned to the Italian ottava rima, preserving the rhyme-scheme (abababcc) of the original but changing its eleven-syllable line into the English ten-syllable iambic line. He wrote only sixteen of the twenty-four cantos he intended this 'epic satire' to fill, the publication being spread over five years: Cantos I–II, 1819; III–V, 1821; VI–XIV (in three instalments), 1823; XV–XVI, 1824, a month before his death.

> I want a hero; an uncommon want,
> When every year and month sends forth a new one,
> Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
> The age discovers he is not the true one:
> Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
> I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan—
> We all have seen him, in the pantomime,
> Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

In taking Juan as hero Byron paid no more reverent regard to the traditional Don Juan than pantomimists did: he carried him through shipwreck, love affairs, slavery; into Greece, Turkey, Russia, England. The poem is descriptive, passionate, flippant, serious; a compendium of adventures, a commentary on life, and all the time a satirical dissection of Byron's world. It concerns itself with fewer trivialities and nonentities than commonly creep into satire; its range is wider, its tread lighter, its tone less splenetic. Exile had clarified Byron's vision and matured his intelligence without quenching his detestation of hypocrisy or his hatred of the abuse of power. He still had his prejudices—

> Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
> Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
> Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
> The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy.
> (I, 205)

—but there was substance in the claim made in the penultimate line below (I, 215):

No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:
The illusion's gone for ever, and thou art
Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,
And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgment,
Though heaven knows how it ever found a lodgment.

The Footpad shot by Don Juan on Blackheath.

His most serious defect as a poet was never repaired, however. To the end his language remained opaque; it contents the mind, often stimulates the senses, but neither quickens the imagination nor satisfies the spirit.

Shelley

What Byron lacked, Shelley had in profusion, if not to excess. Though Matthew Arnold showed little more than his own personal limitations in speaking of Shelley as 'in poetry, no less than in life, . . . a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the

void his luminous wings in vain', he nevertheless distinguished the special quality of Shelley's poetry when saying 'It always seems to me that the right sphere for Shelley's genius was the sphere of music . . .'; while Robert Bridges, placing him fourth to Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, wrote of 'Shelley with liquid music in the word'. Liquid music is the essence of Shelley's poetry.

Like Byron he was politically-minded and claimed in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'; but in no poet's work does poetry do so much and politics and humanitarianism so little, even when he was writing with a deliberately reformatory intention. In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) the poet is himself chained to a rock of tedium by the argument concerning the fate of 'the Champion of mankind' in his defiance of the Oppressor, and is released into the freedom of poetry chiefly through a few of the lyrics. In Prometheus's own speeches rhetoric and poetry contest, with only spasmodic half-gains to poetry:

> The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears
> Of their moon-freezing crystals, the bright chains
> Eat with their burning cold into my bones. (I, 31–3)

But when the unfettered Shelley moves into his own sphere, poetry renders its unique, however intangible, service:

> On a poet's lips I slept
> Dreaming like a love-adept
> In the sound his breathing kept;
> Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
> But feeds on the aërial kisses
> Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
> He will watch from dawn to gloom
> The lake-reflected sun illume
> The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,
> Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
> But from these create he can
> Forms more real than living man,
> Nurslings of immortality. (I, 737–49)

The Fourth Spirit states here, in language of a singular luminosity, the true function of a poet—to create 'forms more real than living man, nurslings of immortality'—a function performed in its fullness by no one more perfectly than by

Shelley. Though, no less than Byron, he was at war with authority and social conventions and at least as painfully moved by injustice and tyranny, time has sifted out for lasting attention and affection those poems which are free from the weight of contemporary purpose.

Revolt was something of an ingrained habit with Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) from his schooldays. He was born near Horsham in Sussex, the eldest son of Timothy (later Sir Timothy) Shelley, and educated at Sion House, Brentford, and Eton. His unhappy schooldays were relieved by the writing of gothic romances and poetry; and by the time he went in 1810 to University College, Oxford, he had published three books, including *Original Poetry*, by 'Victor and Cazire', written with his sister Elizabeth. He was sent down from the university for printing *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and was consequently disowned by his father. He met in London and married in Edinburgh (1811) the sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook, who drowned herself two years after their parting in 1814, Shelley having formed an association with Mary Godwin, whom he married in 1816. Between his first marriage and its failure he was involved in revolutionary politics in England and Ireland and wrote pamphlets regarded as seditious and heretical or blasphemous. A juvenile poem, *Queen Mab*, written when he was eighteen, and published piratically in 1813, was similarly stigmatized and increased the abhorrence in which he was held by the authorities and other defenders of orthodoxy. Deprived of the custody of his children, he left England in 1818 and lived thereafter in Italy, his father allowing him a settled income.

In 1816 he published his first important poetical work, *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude*, in which 'a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius' whose mind 'thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself', thirsts in vain, and, 'blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave'.[1] The Note on *Alastor* written by Mrs. Shelley for the collected edition of 1839 speaks of 'The solemn spirit that reigns throughout, the worship of the majesty of nature . . . the mingling of the exulting joy which the various aspects of the visible universe inspires with the sad and struggling pangs which

[1] Preface to *Alastor*.

human passion imparts', but it will not be generally agreed now that 'None of Shelley's poems is more characteristic than this', for it is still too much overcast by the indulgent melancholy of youth.

Longer and more ambitious, *The Revolt of Islam* (1818)—first named *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*—was designed, Shelley wrote, to kindle 'within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind'. The reference to Islam is symbolic, for it was the condition of people nearer home in the post-war stress after the struggle against Napoleon that moved Shelley to write this overlong poem. Its five thousand lines dull the edge of indignation and pity, but in many passages the real Shelley emerges, though not yet in maturity:

> The boat was one curved shell of hollow pearl,
> Almost translucent with the light divine
> Of her within; the prow and stern did curl
> Hornèd on high, like the young moon supine,
> When o'er dim twilight mountains dark with pine,
> It floats upon the sunset's sea of beams,
> Whose golden waves in many a purple line
> Fade fast, till borne on sunlight's ebbing streams,
> Dilating, on earth's verge the sunken meteor gleams.

Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation (1818) is a product of Shelley's friendship with Byron (they being the two characters of the title), and the poem is a discussion on individual power over the human mind, followed by an account of a visit to a Venetian madhouse where an inmate tells them his story. Answering in the earlier part of the poem the fatalistic pessimism of Count Maddalo (Byron), Julian says

> it is our will
> That thus chains us to permitted ill—
> We might be otherwise—we might be all
> We dream of happy, high, majestical.
> Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek
> But in our mind? and if we were not weak
> Should we be less in deed than in desire?

The Cenci (1820), a tragedy of hate and horror with incest as its central theme, has been staged occasionally at semi-private performances; but though its motive is honest the play has no dramatic quality, apart from the shock it administers to normal susceptibilities. *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) is a landmark in Shelley's development, since (as indicated above) his lyrical genius flowered there in the choruses and songs.

Having discerned in Emilia Viviani, as he thought, his perfect soul-mate, Shelley addressed to her in 1821 the sustained love poem *Epipsychidion* ('a soul within a soul') which is both an ecstatic celebration of ideal passion and a defence of Shelley's belief in the multiple nature of love:

> I never was attached to that great sect,
> Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
> Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
> And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
> To cold oblivion . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> True Love in this differs from gold and clay
> That to divide is not to take away.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Narrow
> The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
> The life that wears, the spirit that creates
> One object, and one form, and builds thereby
> A sepulchre for its eternity. (149–53; 160–1; 169–73)

The death of Keats in February 1821 inspired Shelley to compose in the summer of that year *Adonais*, perhaps his finest single poem and only below Milton's *Lycidas* among English elegies. In its fifty-five Spenserian stanzas there is scarcely a line that falls below the magnificent level of the whole. It is the one elegy in which perfection of form coexists with intense and active feeling: though the emotion is under control it is something more potent and moving than the 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' of *Lycidas*, of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, or of Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis*. It is at once a song of lamentation and a song of triumph in which, in terms of unblemished beauty, mortality has put on immortality:

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again;
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais. —Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;

. . . . . .

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light. . . .

. . . . . .

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely. . . .

Of Shelley's wealth of lyrics it is impracticable and unnecessary to speak in other than general terms. Between 1819 and 1822 he wrote the 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark', 'The Cloud', 'To Night' ('Swiftly walk o'er the western wave'), 'A Lament' ('O world! O life! O time!'), 'To ——' ('One word is too often profaned'), 'When the lamp is shattered', 'With a Guitar, to Jane' ('Ariel to Miranda'), 'The Indian Serenade' ('I arise from dreams of thee'), and many others without which English poetry would be unthinkably impoverished. In addition during those fruitful years he wrote other notable poems: 'Lines written among the Euganean Hills' (1818), 'Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples' (1818), 'The Sensitive Plant' (1820), 'Ode to Liberty' (1820); and earlier the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1816) and 'Mont Blanc' (1816). He had the power of writing, as it were, from within his subject, so that neither vision nor feeling is externalized, but the poet becomes one with his poem.

Shelley was drowned while sailing from Leghorn for Spezzia. His body was recovered ten days later and burned on the shore at Viareggio in the presence of Byron, Leigh Hunt, and E. J. Trelawny, the ashes being then taken to Rome and buried beside the grave of Keats, a volume of whose poems had been found in his pocket.

Keats

In the unschooled luxuriance of his imagination Keats was more naturally a poet than any other of the great Romantics, and he was the only one among them without a university education. Poetry welled from him as from an unconducted spring, wantoning headily along until in its brief course it found its own controlling channel; for if *Endymion* suffers through a fine excess which is at once its bane and its glory, the *Odes* of only two years later achieve their own harmony of form and substance. Wordsworth wrote under the curb of intellectual imagination, Coleridge in an imaginative trance; Byron's urgent impulse towards romantic self-dramatization was held in check by his experience-ridden sardonic view of the world; the tendency of Shelley's poetry to dissolve into light and air and evanescent sound is overcome by his absolute sense of the architectonic values of verbal and metrical structure. Keats lived too short a time to proceed completely from the state of being the victim of poetry to becoming its complete master. The fluidity of the medium carried his imagination so buoyantly and swiftly along that the intellectual content of his verse is less evident than its poetic beauty. Indeed, his leading principle that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty' is largely robbed of its proper meed of metaphysical consideration by the exquisite verbal flow of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* at the end of which the phrase comes. If Keats is judged in the light of his poetry alone he seems, paradoxically, a lesser poet than if his letters, also, are read as an essential part of his whole work, not simply as a supplement to his poems. It is in the prose of the letters that his true intellectual stature is most clearly apparent. He would be among the great writers on the evidence of his letters alone, even if his poems were lost; though we could not say 'even if his poems had not been written', for no one but a great

practising poet could have written letters like Keats's. Yet they display aspects of Keats which are unapparent or less evident in the poems—his human warmth and kindliness, the capaciousness and strength of his mind, his abounding common sense, and (in the letters to Fanny Brawne) the desperate tearing and searing of tragic passion.

Shelley thought that Keats would never be a popular poet, but he has in fact become the most popular of the Romantics and has also received as much admiring attention from later scholarly critics as any poet of his time. He came from an unpoetic environment. His father kept a livery stable at Finsbury Pavement in the City of London, and there John Keats (1795–1821) was born, the eldest in a family of two other sons (George and Tom) and a daughter (Fanny). In 1803 he went to school at Enfield, where the master's son, Charles Cowden Clarke,[1] became his close friend and had the earliest sight in 1815 of the sonnet 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer'. Keats remained at the Rev. John Clarke's school until 1810, the year of his mother's death (his father had died in 1804), and was then articled to a surgeon at Edmonton until 1814, after which he studied at St. Thomas's and Guy's hospitals, passed the Apothecaries' Society's examination in 1816, and went back to Guy's as a dresser. Although as a boy he had shown no particular literary bent, poetry took an irresistible hold on him during his medical training period and in 1817 he was writing 'I find that I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry—half the day will not do—the whole of it—I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan. . . .'[2] By that time he had written the 'Chapman's Homer' sonnet, and also 'Sleep and Poetry' in which two strains conflict, the sensuousness of romance and the realities of human existence.

> O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
> Myself in poetry; so I may do the deed
> That my own soul has to itself decreed

[1] Charles Cowden Clarke (1787–1877) married Mary Victoria Novello (1809–98) in 1828. As 'the loving author couple' they became, through writing and lecturing, indefatigable popularizers of Shakespeare, Chaucer, and others. Working through the plays line by line, she compiled the *Complete Shakespeare Concordance* (1844–5). Of their numerous other publications only his *Recollections of Writers* (1878) is more than ephemeral.

[2] Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 17-18 April 1817.

Then will I pass the countries that I see
In long perspective, and continually
Taste their pure fountains. . . .

. . . . . .

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts: . . .

Following a passage into which a poetic vision of enlightenment is projected,

A sense of real things comes doubly strong,
And, like a muddy stream, would bear along
My soul to nothingness: . . .

. . . . . .

Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood, that the high
Imagination cannot freely fly
As she was wont of old? . . .

(96–101; 122–5; 157–9; 162–5)

he cries and repeats:

O Poesy! for thee I hold my pen
That am not yet a denizen
Of thy wide heaven—

and postulates as 'the great end of poetry'

that it should be a friend
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.

(47–9 and 53–5; 246–7)

Keats's abiding fascination by the romantic aspect of Greek mythology began with his reading in Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, but neither that strain in his poetry nor any evidence of response to 'the agonies, the strife of human hearts' was as valuable as the freshness and acuteness of visual and aural perception and recollection which makes his writings so rich a storehouse of sights and sounds. One of the earliest of his poems, 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill' offers a remarkable prospect of English country and garden things—of clouds and sky, woodlands and streams, grass and hedgerows and flowers, birds and fishes, sounds, and even silences,

A little noiseless noise among the leaves.

It passes on into the field of classical myth, and it was to this poem he alluded when writing to Cowden Clarke (17 December 1816) 'I have done little to Endymion lately', for in its later part it is something of a first essay in the kind which came to lush fruition in the published *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* of 1818.

By that time he had abandoned surgery for poetry and had made the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt and Benjamin Robert Haydon. His first volume of poems (1817), dedicated to Hunt, contained the early poems mentioned above, with others. It and *Endymion* were made the occasion of the fourth article (August 1818) in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in a series 'On the Cockney School of Poetry' which attacked Leigh Hunt in chief as the 'Doctor and Professor' of the 'School' and is only remarkable now, apart from its contemporary effect, as an instance of repulsive vulgarity in criticism. But while *Blackwood's* fulminated again *Endymion*, declaring that it had nothing to do with Greece and showed not 'the smallest knowledge or feeling of classical poetry or classical history', Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* (though not until two years later, August 1820) weighed Keats's poetry judicially, pointing to its 'extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity' but saying that it was 'at least as full of genius as absurdity' and that anyone who represented 'the whole poem as despicable, must either have no notion of poetry, or no regard to truth'.[1] He saw that a great deal of the merit of *Endymion* lay in the fact, bemoaned by *Blackwood's*, that Keats had taken from the characters in pagan mythology 'little more . . . than the general conception of their condition and relations; and an original character and distinct individuality is then bestowed upon them, which has all the merit of invention, and all the grace and attraction of the fictions on which it is engrafted'.

Keats was himself aware of the faults of *Endymion*. Without mawkish self-deprecation he spoke of it in the short Preface as the product of 'great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished'. He regarded it rightly as a thing to be purged from

[1] For these articles and others of the period see *Contemporary Reviews of Romantic Poetry*, edited by John Wain (Harrap, London, 1953).

his imagination and sent out into the world so that 'While it is dwindling I may be plotting, and fitting myself for verses fit to live'. His command of pregnant brevity in prose has given one passage from this Preface a more stable currency than almost anything in the poem itself: 'The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted. . . .' It is impossible to make a juster diagnosis of *Endymion* than Keats's own: 'the foundations are too sandy'. Abundance and exuberance of fancy receive no check in its four thousand lines, and in that respect it is entirely un-Greek, or Greek only in relation to the flaccid romantic decline of the Hellenistic Age. Jeffrey suggested that its near sources were Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* and Ben Jonson's *The Sad Shepherd*, an unfortunate ancestry since the enervated pastoral masque was of all models the worst for Keats; its epicene spirit softened the influence of Milton, which can be seen in, e.g., the account of Circe's rabble (Book III, 490 ff.), and of Shakespeare, in whom Keats's mind was steeped to its ultimate great good. The wonder of *Endymion* is that it is still irresistible. Notwithstanding the tiresomely ambling story, the poetry leads us on enchantingly. In its slumbrous maze lie innumerable miniatures straight from Nature: 'the daisies, vermeil rimmed and white, hide in deep herbage'; 'the bees hum about globes of clover and sweet peas'; 'Autumn bold, with universal tinge of sober gold'; 'the surgy murmurs of the lonely sea'—a line how near to Shakespeare and yet how far from him, for Shakespeare would not have admitted 'surgy'; nor would Shakespeare have run to Keats's excess in picturing sunlight on the sea:

> from the horizon's vaulted side,
> There shot a golden splendour far and wide,
> Spangling those million poutings of the brine
> With quivering ore: . . .

Endymion, published in May 1818, was splendid apprentice work and no more. Yet the twelve months beginning with the autumn of that same year saw the writing of all the poems which assure Keats a place among the greatest. It was a tragic as well as a wonderful year. In *Sleep and Poetry* he had asked for

ten more years; he was to have only five. Tuberculosis of the lungs manifested itself in 1818, and a few months later he watched his brother Tom die slowly of the same disease. These calamities and the beginning of his feverish love for Fanny Brawne (to whom he became engaged in 1819) were for long accepted as the driving forces behind his great burst of concentrated poetic energy. A further cause has since been found in a carefully concealed amorous relationship with a Mrs. Isabella Jones, with whom he first became closely acquainted in the early part of the productive period.[1] It is suggested that 'The Eve of St. Agnes' (published in the composite volume of 1820) is largely an autobiographical rendering in romantic costume of the central episode in his intimacy with Isabella, who imposed secrecy (or at least anonymity) upon their association. But 'The Eve of St. Agnes' requires no chapter about Isabella Jones to heighten its interest. With or without her it is one of Keats's greatest achievements, for while it is not free of the 'shadows haunting faerily the brain, new stuff'd in youth, with triumphs gay of old romance' it combines with those shadows a new sense of reality and a disciplining of Keats's formerly errant pictorial sense and verbal uncertainty. From the first lines the poem takes a firm hold through felicitously suggestive yet exact images (though a purist might blench at 'woolly fold' in the fourth line):

> St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!
> The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
> The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
> And silent was the flock in woolly fold.

In the chapel 'the sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze' and

> The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
> Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
> With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their breasts.

It is not so much in the magnificent set-pieces of description—of which there are many besides that of the stained-glass

[1] This 'discovery' was made by Robert Gittings and detailed by him in *John Keats: The Living Year* (Heinemann, London, 1954), but hotly refuted by John Middleton Murry in *Keats* (Cape, London, 1955).

window in Madeline's chamber—nor in the wealth of other lovely lines, e.g.

> And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
> In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,

that the poem is unique, as in the permanent impression made by 'ordinary' language. We *recall* that

> The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,
> Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar;

but we *remember* that 'the long carpets rose along the gusty floor'.

The 1820 volume included also the great Odes: 'To a Nightingale', 'On a Grecian Urn', 'To Autumn', and others; 'Lamia'; 'Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil'; 'Hyperion'. Superlatives are rebuked by the perfection of the Odes, though only in superlatives can they be adequately praised. But here again it is in their re-presentation of the familiar that they excel, as in the final lines of the 'Ode to Autumn':

> Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
> Among the river sallows, borne aloft
> Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
> And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
> Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
> The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
> And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

'A poet' wrote Keats[1] 'is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence' and went on to give what is possibly the best of all accounts of the nature of a poet. Though poetry was an essential part of life to him, he could take a light-hearted view of its making. He poked fun even at 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', which is unapproached as a precise unification of subject, form, and atmosphere. It is also something of a booby-trap for symbolist interpreters, as Keats foresaw (*vide* stanza 8 of the first and better version[2]):

[1] Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818.

[2] This forms part of the long letter to his brother and sister-in-law (George and Georgiana Keats) in America, written at intervals from 14 February to 3 May 1819, where the poem appears in first draft with excisions and corrections.

> Why four kisses—you will say—why four because I wish to restrain the headlong impetuosity of my Muse—she would have fain said 'score' without hurting the rhyme—but we must temper the Imagination as the Critics say with Judgment. I was obliged to choose an even number that both eyes might have fair play: and to speak truly I think two a piece quite sufficient. Suppose I had said seven; there would have been three and a half a piece—a very awkward affair—and well got out of on my side—

Yet this healthy avoidance of any heavy solemnity of approach in no way detracts from the impression of spontaneity and inevitability in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', nor from its mystery and magic, its hints of tragedy below the surface of romance, and its sense of utter irremediable desolation of spirit:

> And this is why I sojourn here
> Alone and palely loitering;
> Though the sedge is withered from the Lake,
> And no birds sing.

The last phase of Keats's fatal malady began in February 1820. He left England for Italy in September, landed at Naples, and went to Rome in December. There he died on 23 February 1821.

CHAPTER VII

REGENCY PROSE

ONLY Keats among the major poets of his period displayed no strong outward interest in politics. This did not, however, save him from being attacked by the Scottish reviewers, who lumped him together with Leigh Hunt and others, the group derided by *Blackwood's* through political animus as 'the Cockney School of Poetry'. Political animus was heavy in the atmosphere of the time and was indulged by both the leading parties, Whig and Tory. The French Revolution bred many active sympathizers in Britain and revolutionary clubs were as common among artisans and as smart among intellectuals as communist cells were to be a century later, while Napoleon, prefiguring the more monstrous Hitler, also had his British supporters, Hazlitt wholeheartedly among them. But the chief target of objurgation for English writers with strong Liberal views was the Prince Regent, who ruled during the madness of his father from 1811 and succeeded him as George IV in 1820, reigning until 1830. Hated by a majority throughout the country for his debauchery and ill-treatment of his official wife, Caroline of Brunswick, he became the objective of all the anti-monarchical passions then raging. He was openly insulted in the streets and virulently abused by political orators and journalists, notably in the columns of *The Examiner*, founded in 1808 by Leigh Hunt and his brother, who were convicted and jailed (1812–14) for seditious libel. The Regency period and George IV's reign were nevertheless distinctive as the last age of taste and style before rampant industrialism negatived all æsthetic standards.

Crabb Robinson

Many valuable and entertaining glimpses of leading writers in the earlier part of the nineteenth century are given in the writings of Henry Crabb Robinson (1775–1867), who accounted for his neglect to attempt anything more ambitious than reminiscences by saying to his publisher: 'I early found that I had not

the literary ability to give me such a place among English authors as I should have desired; but I thought that I had an opportunity of gaining a knowledge of many of the most distinguished men of the age, and that I might do some good by keeping a record of my interviews with them'.[1] He was born at Bury St. Edmunds and, notwithstanding some early reluctance to the law, became articled to an attorney at Colchester and was called to the Bar in 1813, having thereafter a moderate income on the Norfolk circuit, of which he became leader. In 1807 he acted as a foreign correspondent of *The Times*; in the same year, as its foreign editor in London; and subsequently represented the paper in Spain during the Peninsular War. He left *The Times* in 1809. Through Catherine Buck, the sister of one of his boyhood friends (later Mrs. Clarkson, wife of the founder of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade) he was introduced to the Lamb-Coleridge-Wordsworth circle and remained through many years their devoted and esteemed yet not uncandid friend. Though in later life he became critical of William Godwin's views he regarded *Political Justice*, which he read at the age of twenty, as 'a book which gave a turn to my mind, and in effect directed the whole course of my life . . . it made me feel more generously. I had never before, nor, I am afraid, have I ever since felt so strongly the duty of not living to one's self, but of having for one's sole object the good of the community.' He was an uncommonly contented man throughout most of his bachelor life, and the last entry of the year in his diary was often in some such terms as 'So passed away the last hours of the year [1820]—a year which I have enjoyed as I have the former years of my life, but which has given me a deeper conviction than I ever had of the insignificance of my own character'. Sincere though this last reflection was, it was true only in the sense that he cut no great figure in public life. As a witness to the attributes, activities, and observations of greater men he has had considerable posthumous significance. His accounts of Coleridge's lectures, which he attended assiduously, have the merit of first-rate descriptive reporting, less in what they say of the lecturer's material than in their acute

[1] Recorded in the Preface (p. vi) to *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, selected and edited by Thomas Sadler (3 vols., Macmillan, London, 1869).

assessment of the quality of his mind, both in its frequent ramblings and in its exceptional powers of penetration:

> . . . he has certain unfortunate habits, which he will not (perhaps *can*not) correct, very detrimental to his interests—I mean the vices of apologizing, anticipating, and repeating. (29 Nov. 1811.) . . . In his sixth lecture he was, by advertisement, to speak of 'Romeo and Juliet' and Shakespeare's females; unhappily, some demon whispered the name of Lancaster [a Quaker schoolmaster] in his ear; and we had, in one evening, an attack on the poor Quaker, a defence of board-school flogging, a parallel between the ages of Elizabeth and Charles, a defence of what is untruly called unpoetic language, an account of the different languages of Europe, and a vindication of Shakespeare against the imputation of grossness. (13 Dec. 1811.) . . . His last three lectures have, for the greater part, been all that his friends could wish—his admirers expect. . . . His remarks on Richard II and Hamlet very excellent. Last night he concluded his fine development of the Prince of Denmark by an excellent statement of the moral of the play. 'Action', he said, 'is the great end of all; no intellect, however grand, is valuable, if it draw us from action and lead us to think and think till the time of action is passed by, and we can do nothing.' Someone said to me, 'This is a satire on himself'. —'No', said I, 'it is an elegy.' (3 Jan. 1812.)

Of Hazlitt's lectures Crabb Robinson remarks that at first he seemed to have 'no conception of the difference between a lecture and a book' and read in a low monotonous voice with his eyes fixed on the manuscript, though on later occasions he became livelier: '. . . Hazlitt's last lecture. Very well delivered, and full of shrewd observations.' (27 Apr. 1812.)

Crabb Robinson and Wordsworth frequently met, corresponded, walked, and travelled abroad together, the poet's opinions on his own work being a point of special interest in the Diary, which also includes reminiscences of Coleridge's schooldays, much about Charles and Mary Lamb, and occasional references to Shelley, Keats, De Quincey, and Leigh Hunt, who appeared to the diarist to have 'a glee about him which evinced high spirits, if not perfect health' and to be 'the very opposite of Hazlitt. He loves everything, he catches the sunny side of everything, and, excepting that he has a few polemical antipathies, finds everything beautiful.' (18 Apr. 1818; 29 Oct. 1820.) The entry for 6 Nov. 1817 runs:

> I went to Godwin's, Mr. Shelley was there. I had never seen him before. His youth [he was then twenty-five], and a resemblance to Southey, particularly in his voice, raised a pleasing impression, which was not altogether destroyed by his conversation, though it is vehement, and arrogant, and intolerant. He was very abusive towards Southey, whom he spoke of as having sold himself to the Court. And this he maintained with the usual party slang. . . . Shelley spoke of Wordsworth with less bitterness, but with an insinuation of his insincerity, &c.

Having been lent a copy of Scott's *Waverley*, he sets down the opinion (5 Feb. 1815) that 'the author's sense of the romantic and picturesque in nature is not so delicate, or his execution so powerful, as Mrs. Radcliffe's, but his paintings of men and manners are more valuable. The incidents are not so dextrously contrived, and the author has not produced a very interesting personage in his hero. . . . There is more than the usual portion of good sense in this book, which may enjoy, though not immortality, at least a long life.' He recognized the genius of Keats, saying 'there are a force, wildness, and originality in the works of this young poet which, if his perilous journey to Italy does not destroy him, promise to place him at the head of the next generation of poets. Lamb places him next to Wordsworth. . . . I am greatly mistaken if Keats do not very soon take a high place among our poets. Great feeling and a powerful imagination are shown in this little volume.' (8 and 15 Dec. 1820.) Under 10 December 1825 and later dates appear lengthy and valuable accounts of meetings and conversations with Blake, whose personality and manner are livingly presented. The elderly poet-artist spoke freely and characteristically, saying, *inter alia*, 'I should be sorry if I had any earthly fame, for whatever natural glory a man has is so much taken from his spiritual glory. I wish to do nothing for profit. I wish to live for art. I want nothing whatever. I am quite happy.'

Although Crabb Robinson's writings have been valued principally as a mirror in which his contemporaries are excellently reflected, his Diary has independent merits. His range of interests was wide: he travelled much at home and abroad and conversed on equal terms with many eminent people, Goethe among them. He details a number of his legal cases; writes much of the theatre and players, particularly Mrs. Siddons;

and in general had that liberal curiosity which is the basic qualification of a good diarist. If his interest in women had been warmer—he was a comfortable friend to them, no amorous pursuer—and if he had had a sharper eye for the oddities of life, his Diary might have equalled Pepys's in popularity. But its hallmark is not quaintness but admirable commonsense; and though he wrote throughout the Regency period and was intimate with the Romantics, his style is neither ornamented, nor allusive, nor ecstatic. He wrote as he thought, with clarity and lucidity. He was above all, a loyal friend, even to the point of breaking permanently with Hazlitt in consequence of his abuse of Wordsworth.

Charles and Mary Lamb

After he had cut Hazlitt, Mary Lamb said to Crabb Robinson: 'You are rich in friends. We cannot afford to cast off our friends because they are not all we wish.' Yet none could have been richer in friends than the Lambs, and certainly there were few to whom they were closer than to Crabb Robinson, who mentions them frequently with warm affection, speaking of Charles Lamb's 'great taste and feeling', 'good humour and playfulness'; and saying that in tête-a-tête conversation Lamb was 'serious and kind' and his wit then subordinate to his judgment; that his enjoyments were 'so pure and hearty that it is an enjoyment to see him enjoy'. At moments Crabb Robinson lights up a friend's personality by some indirect touch: 'Walked out and called on Miss Lamb. I looked over Lamb's library in part. He has the finest collection of shabby books I ever saw; such a number of first-rate works in very bad condition is, I think, nowhere to be found.' (10 Jan. 1824.)

The Lambs were then living at Colebrook Cottage, Islington, and Charles was within some fifteen months of his retirement from the India House at the age of fifty. There is no other English writer whose work it is so impossible to disengage from his own personality and circumstances as Lamb's. Everything that is durable in what he wrote was coloured and flavoured by the unique combination of qualities found in him by Crabb Robinson, who reached to the core of Lamb's style and choice of matter in saying that he 'reasons from feelings': the wisdom of the heart is the universalizing factor in the Elia papers, which

brought into English literature an entirely new kind—the intimately personal *familiar essay*, reminiscent, humorous, tinged with elusive pathos, and veined with literary allusions which give added pleasure to the knowledgeable without obstructing the enjoyment of the less bookish. Lamb carried sentiment far without falling into sentimentality, though his reasoning from feeling relaxes the structure of his prose and discommends him to those moderns who draw nourishment only from rigidly impersonal and emotionally attenuated literature.

The element of pathos in the Lambs' experience has almost certainly engaged the sympathies of posterity more persistently than it troubled Charles and Mary themselves. It was a shadow with which they lived without being engulfed, for few men can have drawn fuller enjoyment from life than Charles, while his sister's eighty-three years appear to have held more of settled contentment than of uneasy apprehension of the shadow.

Mary Lamb was eleven when Charles Lamb (1775–1834) was born at Crown Office Row in the Temple, and she outlived him by thirteen years. Their father was confidential clerk to a bencher of the Inner Temple who, in 1782, obtained a place for the boy at Christ's Hospital, the school then in Newgate Street, within easy walking distance from home. Both before and after adopting the Elia pseudonym he wrote much of those early years, in the Elia essay 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' using the first personal pronoun with a measure of dramatic licence which fathers some of his school-friend Coleridge's emotions upon himself. Leaving school when he was fourteen (1789), Lamb served as a clerk in the South Sea House for two years, and then went into the accountant's office at East India House, where he remained for thirty-three years (1792–1825), though he swelled the period by three years in 'The Superannuated Man' (*Last Essays of Elia*):

> It is now six and thirty years since I took my seat at the desk in Mincing Lane. Melancholy was the transition at fourteen from the abundant playtime, and the frequently intervening vacations of school days, to the eight, nine, and sometimes ten hours' a-day attendance at a counting house. But time partially reconciles us to anything. I gradually became content—doggedly content, as wild animals in cages.

The haunting sense of incapacity for business, of which he speaks later in this essay, was no doubt illusory, for his salary rose to £600 a year and he retired on a pension of £441, no signs of incapacity or incompetence.

The shadow had manifested itself when he was only twenty-one, first in an (unrepeated) attack of insanity which confined him to Hoxton Asylum for six weeks during the winter of 1795–6, while, in the September following, Mary in a sudden fit of madness attacked those who were at home with her and stabbed her mother fatally. After the inquest she was committed to the care of Charles, with whom she lived for the next thirty-eight years until his death, except for the occasional intervals when she felt insanity again approaching and they would walk across the fields together to the asylum.

> These terrible events for a time greatly quickened the religious side of Lamb's character. His letters to Coleridge are severe, ascetical. He foreswore poetry and amusements, even such as were in the reach of a poor boy of twenty-one maintaining a household on an income of £180. This wore off, and Lamb became in men's hasty judgments one of the profane—a trifler, a jester. Carlyle, we know only too well, met him once, and dismissed him with a sulphureous snort. My belief is that Lamb, feeling his own mental infirmity, and aware of the fearful life-long strain to which he was to be subjected, took refuge in trifles seriously, and played the fool in order to remain sane.[1]

The number and mental calibre of Lamb's devoted and lasting friends—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Crabb Robinson, and a host more—and the evidence of their correspondence, indicates that playing the fool was a less prominent trait than the personal legend has suggested. Lamb had a marked faculty of robust common sense; he does not fit the sentimental fantasy of the clown jesting to keep his heart from breaking. As a letter-writer he has had few equals, and none has excelled him in appreciations of human character expressed with astringent and occasionally sardonic humour.

He was forty-five when the essays signed 'Elia' began to appear in *The London Magazine* in 1820. By then he had been

[1] Augustine Birrell: Introduction to *The Essays of Elia* (Everyman's Library, 1906).

an author for nearly a quarter of a century, Coleridge having included four sonnets by Lamb in *Poems on Various Occasions* (1796). With Charles Lloyd he produced a volume of *Blank Verse* (1798); *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret* (1798) was followed by a blank-verse tragedy, *John Woodvil* (1802); and in 1805 *Mr. H——*, a farce, was produced at Drury Lane. Crabb Robinson, who was with Lamb for the performance, records that the author joined heartily with the rest of the audience in hissing the play, which is indeed a poor thing, turning upon the reluctance of the hero to reveal that his name is Hogsflesh. Charles and Mary collaborated in the endlessly popular *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), and in *The Adventures of Ulysses* (1808), *Mrs. Leicester's School* (1808), and *Poetry for Children* (1809). Meanwhile he had contributed numerous essays of a pre-Elia kind to periodicals, and a two-volume edition of *The Works of Charles Lamb*—the imposing title amused him—came out in 1818.

It is impossible to guess what rank Lamb would hold in literature if the *Works* had had no supplementation. His essays up to that point do not lack individual character, and a number of them are at least equal to the best of other contemporary essayists. But as 'Elia' he was somehow released into a new freedom of style. The formalities of prose are loosened, conversational ease takes over, and everything is presented or filtered through the author's own personality and temperament. Yet almost every sentence retains some literary accent and colouring. Though everything creates the illusion of good *talk*, it is like no talk that ever was; it is always good *writing*—e.g. on a bride and her bridesmaids in 'The Wedding' (*Last Essays of Elia*):

> I am ill at describing female apparel; but while *she* stood at the altar in vestments white and candid as her thoughts, a sacrificial whiteness, *they* assisted in robes, such as might become Diana's nymphs—Foresters indeed—as such who had not yet come to the resolution of putting off cold virginity.

The prose is relaxed but exquisitely cadenced—'in vestments white and candid as her thoughts' . . . 'the resolution of putting off cold virginity'—and Lamb maintained it without apparent labour through more than fifty essays with subtle modulations

to each change of subject and mood, whether it be the comic fantasy of 'A Dissertation upon Roast Pig', the sentiment-laden reverie of 'Dream Children', or the romantically elegiac antiquarianism of 'Old China' with its discourse from the lips of Cousin Bridget (Mary Lamb) on the good times past when they had less and valued more. The sentences may wind on in a parenthetical procession accumulating memories and reflections, but the procession comes at the fit moment to its goal without straying or stumbling.

William Hazlitt

Since Lamb stands apart, alone in his class, his stature as a writer in relation to William Hazlitt (1778–1830) does not arise, though many would claim that Hazlitt is superior to Lamb. He played a bigger part in affairs—he was in fact a public man whereas Lamb was essentially private; he lifted himself from obscurity to both fame and notoriety; but there is little to admire in his character and he generates no affection. He was born at Maidstone in Kent, the son of a Dissenting minister and was himself intended for the Unitarian ministry. He took, instead, to painting, in which he had only a limited aptitude and is remembered solely for his portrait of Charles Lamb as a Venetian Senator. Like others of his generation, his energies were directed into new paths through meeting Coleridge, who went to preach at Shrewsbury while the Hazlitts were living ten miles away. Hazlitt walked through the mud on a January morning in 1798, and felt more than sufficiently rewarded by the sermon: 'I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of religion. This was even beyond my hopes. I returned home well satisfied.'[1] He met Coleridge again a few days later, listening to him in silence for two hours, enraptured by his discourse but viewing his person with an unromanticizing eye: 'His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humoured and round; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing. . . .' The acquaintance developed and Hazlitt

[1] 'My First Acquaintance with Poets': *Winterslow*, 1839.

was started on the road to literature, in which he worked prolifically, though he said 'I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best'.

It was on what pleased him best in a loitering way that he wrote best. The 'bigger' the subject the less important it became in his hands: thus his first and ponderous work *Essays on the Principles of Human Nature* (1805) is negligible, and the product of his fanatical anti-patriotism, the *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1828–30) is no more important as historical biography. As a pioneer dramatic critic, however, he set and maintained a high standard of independent judgment and integrity, and even if his lectures on *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817) appear superficial beside Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures, they are more generally comprehensible and have been (and are still) more widely read. Apart from these, his best essays are contained in the *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1818), *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), and two posthumous collections (both 1839) *Sketches and Essays* and *Winterslow*. He was, however, much swayed by vicious political rancour which led him, in the name of honesty of opinion, to pursue imaginative writers with partisan catcalls. The Spirit of the Age was for him the republican spirit—'reform, civil, political or religious'—and even when he had admitted that Sir Walter Scott's 'worst is better than any other person's best' and that his novels '(taken together) are almost like a new edition of human nature' Hazlitt thrashed himself into a spitting fury and in a penultimate sentence more than fifty lines long charged Scott with base political motives—with, e.g. 'deluging, nauseating the public mind with the offal and garbage of Billingsgate abuse and vulgar *slang*'—and reached as his final verdict the conclusion that 'we believe there is no other age or country of the world (but ours), in which genius could have been so degraded'. When politics did not obtrude with 'the offal and garbage of Billingsgate abuse' in which he was himself adept Hazlitt was among the best of critics, as in the essay on Wordsworth in *The Spirit of the Age*, though elsewhere he turned against Wordsworth, too, in the terms which caused Crabb Robinson to disown him as a friend.

In the introductory discourse to his *Lectures on the English Poets*—'On Poetry in General'—Hazlitt defined poetry as 'the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself', but proceeds less vaguely, though invariably in the large:

> Poetry is in all its shapes the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more abused than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason: for the end and use of poetry, 'both at the first and now, was and is to hold the mirror up to nature', seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by literal truth or abstract reason.

Hazlitt's addiction to quoted phrases studs his prose with excrescences, whereas Lamb makes them a part of the woven texture of his, turning them often from direct quotations into allusions which merge into the pattern of the verbal fabric. So is it also with Lamb's humour, while, in comparison, Hazlitt's tends towards facetiousness. He is deficient in lightness of touch and therefore markedly the inferior of Lamb in managing the familiar essay, though he may at times excel him in writing a more structurally masculine prose. This quality should be exclusive in 'The Fight'—as good a pugilistic essay as any ever written—but Hazlitt could not refrain from a disgustingly coy gallantry in the opening paragraph: 'Ladies! it is to you I dedicate this description; . . . Think, ye fairest of the fair, loveliest of the lovely kind, ye practisers of soft enchantment, how many more ye kill with poisoned baits than ever fell in the ring; . . .'

Hazlitt married twice and twice mistakenly. His first wife divorced him at his request in 1822, when he was forty-four and besottedly infatuated by his landlady's wanton daughter. He wrote an account of his abasements and torments in *Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion* (1823), 'something between a work of art and a case history, containing some of the loveliest pages in English and some of the silliest',[1] which brought upon him the wrath of the censorious.

[1] See 'Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*', by Cyril Connolly, *The London Magazine*, November 1954, pp. 58–63.

Leigh Hunt

Leigh Hunt (1784–1859) conducted the familiar essay with more ease than Hazlitt, and is second only to Lamb in that genre (see, for example, 'On Getting up on Cold Mornings'). He, too, went to Christ's Hospital, three years after Lamb left, and was only seventeen when he published his first collection of poems, *Juvenilia* (1801). Beginning as a dramatic critic in 1805, his lively sense of the theatre and his love of acting enabled him to breathe more life into his notices than Hazlitt got into his more deliberately studied essays. Leigh Hunt has the right to be named the first modern critic of the stage, for the play in performance properly impinged on his sensibilities more acutely than the consideration of the author's text as literature. Reference has been made above (p. 116) to *The Examiner* founded by Leigh and John Hunt and there is no call here to follow his career as a political writer, though the account of his imprisonment provides one of the most absorbing and surprising chapters in Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography* (1850), his best book. He was confined in the Horsemonger Lane gaol where he occupied a vacant ward in the infirmary, which '. . . I turned into a noble room. I papered the walls with a trellis of roses; I had the ceiling coloured with clouds and sky; the barred windows I screened with Venetian blinds; and when my book-cases were set up with their busts, and flowers and a pianoforte made their appearance, perhaps there was not a handsomer room on that side of the water.'[1] His wife went to live with him, a child was born to them there, his friends—Lamb, Byron, and others—visited him and admired his garden. He had everything, except the thing he cherished most, *freedom*. As a poet he won contemporary repute with *The Story of Rimini* (1816) and other works in verse, but apart from the *Autobiography* little of his extensive literary output has survived, though *The Town* (1844) and *The Old Court Suburb; or, Memorials of Kensington* (1855) merit rescue from neglect.

Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786–1846), who committed suicide after vain attempts to secure fame and wealth with vast and grandiose religious paintings, receives admiring attention now for his excellent autobiographical writings.

[1] *Autobiography*, ch. XIV.

Thomas De Quincey

The most dislikeable writer of this period, Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859), was also one of the most horridly fascinating. On the evidence of his *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets* (in Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine*, 1834 and after) he was a scandal-mongering posturing egoist, a priggish hypocrite, and a repulsive snob. But he could at times shed these vices, write sound sense, and (at his best) write like no one else. He cannot be admired as a man; he cannot be ignored as a writer. His chapters on Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and others in the *Reminiscences* are essential contributions to biography and literary history when dredged of their smirking domestic gossip, and though he uses the term himself he usefully points out that there was no such group as 'the Lake Poets', but only certain dissimilar poets who happened to live at the same time in that area.

De Quincey's writings are monumentally digressive and he is often most impressive when he turns aside from his immediate subject. Unlike Hazlitt he could write judicially on political themes, and his prose is not far from its best in the passage in the Coleridge chapter of the *Reminiscences*, where he treats of causes which alienated sympathy from the French Republic in the later stages of the Revolution:

> The mighty Republic had now begun to revolve through those fierce transmigrations foreseen by Burke . . .: no trace remained of her primitive character; and of that awful outbreak of popular might, which once had made France the land of hope and promise to the whole human race, and had sounded a knell to every form of oppression or abuse, no record was to be found, except in the stupendous power, which cemented its martial oligarchy. Of the people, of the democracy . . . one sole evidence remained; and that lay in the blank power of destruction, and its perfect organization, which none but a popular movement, no power short of that, could have created. The people having been unchained, and as if for the single purpose of creating a vast system of destroying energies, had then immediately recoiled within their own limits, and themselves become the earliest victim of their own stratocracy. In this way France had become an object of jealousy and alarm. It remained to see to what purpose she would apply her new energies. That was soon settled; her new power was wielded from the first by unprincipled and by ambitious men;

and, in 1800, it fell under the permanent control of an autocrat, whose unity of purpose, and iron will, left no room for any hope of change.

The theme here is, as too rarely with De Quincey, a great one and his prose is worthy of it: he wrote, unaware, the epitaph for all revolutions effected by violence.

Nevertheless it is by other things that De Quincey has been immortalized: by the autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822)—he began to take laudanum for the toothache—by the essay 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' and a few other miscellaneous pieces, e.g. 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth', 'The Daughter of Lebanon', 'Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrows'. His reputation as a writer of ornate and ecstatic prose is based upon only a limited part of his prolific work, namely his opium dreams and the passages which read like a pastiche of such dreams. He could write plain prose equally well, and he would have been a better writer if he had been less eager to capitalize his indulgences.

CHAPTER VIII

CONVERSATION PIECES

During the later eighteenth and the main part of the nineteenth century poet after poet attempted in vain to write for the stage. A few poetic dramas—those of Browning and Tennyson more than most—enjoyed temporary success through the popularity and talents of leading players—Macready and Helen Faucit, Irving and Ellen Terry—but the majority were abortive and none has survived in the theatre. While the poets who had no appropriate skill were making these vain assaults, novelists were pouring out material which by a turn of the pen could be translated into excellent stage material. In the absence of effective copyright protection of the original authors, adapters rushed to bring popular novels to the stage, usually with the purpose of exploiting their romantic and melodramatic possibilities. A more striking fact, however, is that at least two early nineteenth-century novelists, Peacock and Jane Austen, had the talent for character and dialogue that the poets lacked, yet they did not reach the stage until a century or more later, when it was found that there lay at hand in *Nightmare Abbey* a brilliant comedy-farce for intellectuals, while *Pride and Prejudice* was turned with ease into a stage play and also a popular film. It is not surprising that Jane Austen had no theatrical ambitions; but Peacock was an ardent playgoer and an admirable dramatic critic, and in his early years wrote two farces which were neither performed nor (until 1910) published. J. R. Planché filched *Maid Marian* as an opera libretto in 1822, however, and Peacock's freedom from the further attentions of stage pirates was no doubt due to the contemporary inability of theatre audiences to find dramatic interest or rewarding entertainment in the clash of ideas and the presentation of character through conversation and discussion. The current taste was, rather, for the clash of emotions and passions presented through physical action and rhodomontade.

Peacock

Like Walter Savage Landor, Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866) was homesick for the ancient world. The life and thought of classical Greece served him as a constant standard of reference by which he measured and found sadly wanting the world of his own time. But Peacock's middle name was as apt for Peacock as Landor's middle name was for Landor. If Peacock's satire is occasionally cheap it is never sour. If Christian hope was beyond his reach, or not desired, he was a confident and contented pagan. If modern ideas of progress—the phenomenon for which his ironical term was 'the March of Mind'—seemed to him a calamitous regress, his large tolerance nevertheless enabled him to establish his own equilibrium and to chide human follies with laughter, not with whining or shrill complaint. He was that rarest of all literary figures—a satirist with a capacious mind, a warm heart, and a happy disposition: men might be silly, the web of experience might be chequered, but Life was fun.

The child of Samuel Peacock (of whom very little is known) and Sarah Love Peacock, he was born at Weymouth and brought up by his mother in the home of her father, Captain Thomas Love, at Chertsey in Surrey. His mother and grandfather provided the chief formative influences in Peacock's early life, so far as human relationships were concerned, but in boyhood he also acquired the twofold love of walking and reading which dominated his life and writings. He went to a boarding school at Englefield Green, began to write poetry while there, and afterwards spent a year or two uncomfortably in a London merchant's office. He attempted without success to live by writing, went into the navy for a year as junior secretary on a warship, walked in Scotland, lived in seclusion in Wales, met Shelley in 1811 and formed with him the close friendship which lasted until Shelley's death in 1822, four years after Peacock had at length found a settled post as an Examiner of Indian Correspondence to the East India Company. There he remained from 1818 to 1856, becoming in the later years an expert in the design and running of steamships.

He had become engaged to a certain Fanny Falkner at Chertsey in 1807, when he was twenty-two, and although the engagement was broken and she died a year or so later he never

forgot her; but he married in 1820 Jane Gryffydh, whom he had met in Wales about 1811 but did not see again until after he wrote proposing marriage in November 1819. Their long life together was happy in spite of Jane's becoming an invalid in 1826 (she died in 1851), when his mother took charge of the household and children. Peacock was a great lover of his own and other children, and he was deeply affected by the failure of the marriage of his favourite daughter, Mary Ellen, to George Meredith.[1]

Disappointment in his hope of fame as a poet did not diminish Peacock's love of poetry. His novels are interspersed with lyrics —drinking songs, ballads, war songs, nature poems, comic and satirical songs—occasionally irritating, as some of the versions of Welsh bardic songs in *The Misfortunes of Elphin* are, but at times delightful or amusing: e.g. Marionetta's song in *Nightmare Abbey*, 'Why are thy looks so blank grey friar', an excellent piece of sly nonsense; or Mr. Chainmail's recitation of a mock traditional ballad in *Crochet Castle*, 'Llyn-y-dreiddiad-vrawd: The Pool of the Diving Friar', which has the characteristics of an Ingoldsby Legend though it was written twenty years before Barham started his series of comic tales in verse.[2]

In *Maid Marian* (1822) and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829) Peacock diverged from his customary formula of assembling a group of (mainly) eccentrics in a country-house environment and, through the medium of direct conversation, letting each display his particular obsession. *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, an hilarious yet respectful parody of Arthurian themes, is most memorable as the setting for Peacock's greatest comic character, Prince Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi, Lord High Commissioner of Royal Embankment, whose duty it is to keep in good repair the stone bulwark erected to protect the lowland plain against flooding by the sea. Seithenyn, described as one of 'the three immortal drunkards of the isle of Britain', devoted the proceeds of his office to wine and wassail, leaving the embankment to his deputies, 'who left it to their assistants, who left it to itself'. Told that the embankment is on the point of collapse, he claims that

> the parts that are rotten give elasticity to those that are sound: they give them elasticity, elasticity, elasticity. If it were all sound,

[1] See below, p. 243. [2] See below, p. 161.

it would break by its own obstinate stiffness: the soundness is checked by the rottenness, and the stiffness is balanced by the elasticity. There is nothing so dangerous as innovation.

When the embankment is carried away by a great storm—magnificently described—while the sea sweeps over the land Seithenyn flourishes his sword against it, then leaps into the torrent and is presumed drowned until, long after, he discovers himself to the young bard Taliesin who meets him at the castle of Dinas Vawr. Seithenyn, now chief butler to King Melvas, describes his escape to the incredulous Taliesin:

> I will give you proof that I am not a dead man; for, they say, dead men tell no tales: now I will tell you a tale, and a very interesting one it is. When I saw the sea sapping the tower, I jumped into the water, and just in the nick of time. It was well for me that I had been so provident as to empty so many barrels, and that somebody, I don't know who, but I suppose it was my daughter, had been so provident as to put the bungs into them, to keep them sweet . . . when I jumped into the sea, the sea was just making a great hole in the cellar, and they were floating out by dozens. I don't know how I managed it, but I got one arm over one, and the other arm over another: I nipped them pretty tight; and, though my legs were under water, the good liquor I had in me kept me warm. I could not help thinking . . . that if I had left them full, and myself empty, as a sober man would have done, we should all three, that is, I and the two barrels, have gone to the bottom together, that is to say, separately; for we should never have come together, except at the bottom, perhaps; when no one of us could have done the other any good; whereas they have done me much good, and I have requited it; for, first, I did them the service of emptying them; and then they did me the service of floating me with the tide, whether the ebb, or the flood, or both, is more than I can tell, down to the coast of Dyfed, where I was picked up by fishermen: . . .

The robust Shakespearean humour of Seithenyn is the more remarkable because of its divergence from Peacock's characteristic preference for extracting comedy from the quiet exposure of intellectual absurdity, though good eating and good drinking were always in his view proper adjuncts to civilized living. *Headlong Hall* (1816), his first novel, is of the true Peacockian vintage but not yet matured, and none of the characters displays those fine shades of the exquisitely ludicrous which

gleam in the bland subtleties of *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) and *Crotchet Castle* (1831), less so in *Melincourt* (1817) and in the novel of his old age *Gryll Grange* (1860–1), though the latter has one of his most striking characters in the Reverend Dr. Opimium and one of his most engaging situations in the culminating ninefold marriage.

By caricaturing Shelley as Scythrop Glowry in *Nightmare Abbey* Peacock shocked a good many, but not Shelley himself, who took the satire in good part and even signed himself 'Scythrop' when writing to the author, for the relationship between them, helpful to both, was proof against jars more serious than affectionate ridicule. Indeed, none of the characters in *Nightmare Abbey*, whether Coleridge as Mr. Flosky or Byron as Mr. Cypress, is dislikeable. They are caricatured, they are figures of fun; the irony that flickers around them is revealing, the satire is penetrating; but there is no personal animus. Ideas, not men, are the object of attack, if attack is not too crude a word in relation to this novel: the ideas—reformism, transcendentalism, pessimism—were in the air of the time, a part of the spirit of the age; the men were vehicles for the ideas, even victims of the prevailing atmosphere.

It was no part of Peacock's intentions as a writer to build up fully-formed characters or to construct orderly plots. There is enough of story and character to bear the matter along, but he escaped as often as possible from the strait-jacket of narrative into the freedom of unhindered conversation, interspersed simply with the speakers' names, as in a printed play, and reached his best in that form. There are few finer passages of comedy anywhere than in chapter VII of *Crotchet Castle*, where Mr. Crotchet and the Reverend Dr. Folliott express their opposing views about the propriety of undraped sculpture.

Peacock's women characters have both charm and independence of spirit: while not averse to romance they are nevertheless realists at heart. In *Nightmare Abbey* Lady Clarinda tells her lovelorn suitor Captain Fitzchrome:

> . . . I dare say, love in a cottage is very pleasant; but then it positively must be a cottage *ornée*: but would not the same love be a great deal safer in a castle even if Mammon furnished the fortification? . . . I like large rooms and large looking-glasses, and large parties, and a fine large butler, with a tinge of smooth red in his

face; . . . I think an opera-box a very substantial comfort, and a carriage. You will tell me that many decent people walk arm-in-arm through the snow, and sit in clogs and bonnets in the pit at the English theatre. No doubt it is very pleasant to those who are used to it; but it is not to my taste.

It may be a far cry from Peacock to Bernard Shaw, but Clarinda and Ellie Dunn (*Heartbreak House*) would have understood each other well, and Peacock and Shaw stood on common ground in bringing satire within the compass of geniality and well-mannered writing.

Jane Austen

The present age has been perhaps more persistent than any other in declaring that literature must maintain close contact with affairs and be animated by an acute social consciousness. Yet it is in the present age that Jane Austen's reputation has soared to a point which, in a good many of her admirers, is on the far side of idolatry. She wrote in a period of turmoil, one of the ages when 'the fate of Europe was in the balance', and when even the fate of the world was no doubt a problem of great concern to those whose sense of public duty impelled them constantly to fear the worst. Amid all the perturbations of the time, however, Jane Austen preserved an utter serenity in her novels. Either it did not occur to her that the Napoleonic wars need echo in the parlours of fiction, or she deliberately excluded the ugly noises of the larger world. She could not herself have been unconscious or unconcerned about events, since two of her brothers were in the navy and in due course became admirals.

We can freely admire Jane Austen's prudence and wisdom if of set purpose she determined to confine her novels within the limited range of her own domestic and social *milieu*; still more may we admire her if she recognized, as all too few imaginative writers do, that in human affairs families are more important than nations, and that the ability to write is rarely accompanied by even reasonably good political judgment. It is just because Jane Austen's novels have no touch of the external world's slow stain that they have achieved their lonely eminence. They marvellously distil the essences of human nature in what is no more than a tiny crucible of experience. They draw

from what seem little more than period trivialities and evanescences of fashion such immensities and permanences of life as can be conceived by a comic vision. Tragedy may go incomparably deeper but its vision is narrower; it may touch our emotions profoundly and cleanse us in spirit, but comedy enlarges the understanding and fosters wisdom—the faculties that Jane Austen quickens in attentive readers without ceasing to entertain them.

Born in 1775 she was the youngest of seven children of the Rev. George Austen, rector of Steventon in Hampshire, where she lived until 1801 when the family moved to Bath and in 1805 to Southampton. In 1808, following her father's death, she settled in the village of Chawton, near Alton, and finally in 1817 at Winchester where she died in the same year of consumption and was buried in the cathedral there. That, externally, is the sum total of her life-story, except for occasional visits to London.

Nor is there much to say about her life as a writer. She began to compose stories and miscellaneous pieces when she was a young girl, possibly while she was a child, for the surviving manuscripts of these (the earliest dated 1790, when she was fourteen) are fair copies from previous drafts, of unknown dates. These juvenilia[1] would be suspect if the manuscripts did not exist, since they show a gift for satire such as rarely develops in advance of intellectual maturity. This gift was not yet under control and it more often provokes open laughter than is the case with Jane Austen's novels, where there is much matter for thoughtful amusement but comparatively little for hilarity.

Her first experiences with publishers were discouraging. About 1792 she began her first adult novel *Elinor and Marianne* and read it to her family in 1795. In October 1796 she started on *First Impressions*, finishing it in August 1797. The publisher, Cadell, to whom the author's father offered this second novel declined to read it. *Northanger Abbey*, written in 1798, was bought by a Bath bookseller in 1803 for £10, but he failed to publish it and it was bought back years later. Not until 1811 when Egerton of Whitehall accepted *Sense and Sensibility* (a considerably rewritten version of *Elinor and Marianne*) did she

[1] Collected by R. W. Chapman in *Minor Works* (Vol. VI of The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen, 1954).

become a published author, just on twenty years after beginning her first serious attempt. There is no record of the public reception of *Sense and Sensibility*, apart from the fact that Jane Austen's share of the sales proceeds was £150 and that Egerton was sufficiently pleased to take the revised *First Impressions* and to issue it in 1813 under its new title, *Pride and Prejudice*. *Mansfield Park* was begun in 1812 and published in 1814; *Emma*, which came out in 1816, two years after it was started, was the last to appear in her lifetime, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* being issued posthumously in 1818. Later still came a shorter story *Lady Susan* (written about 1805) and two fragments *The Watsons* (this and *Lady Susan* were appended to J. E. Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*, 2nd edn., 1871), and *Sanditon* (written 1817, unpublished until 1925).

The first known article on her work, printed in the *Quarterly Review* in 1815, spoke of her 'depth of knowledge and dexterity of execution'. Within the limits which she kept, the depth of her knowledge is unquestionable, while dexterity of execution endures as her supreme quality, shown most impressively and with razor-edge exactitude of balance in her management of Miss Bates (in *Emma*), an intolerable bore who is kept just short of boring the reader.

As a letter writer Jane Austen is strangely below standard, though there are valuable scattered references to her novels, and it has to be remembered that many of her letters were destroyed. Of Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) she wrote to her sister Cassandra (29 January 1813), 'I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print', an opinion widely shared by generations of readers. With somewhat wry humour she refers (again to her sister, on 4 February 1813) to 'the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style' suggesting that it would give the reader increased delight through contrast if there were also passages of 'solemn specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparté'—a remark that may possibly be the outcome of an unrecorded rebuke from some contemporary advocate of earnestness and purpose in fiction.

Since her work is so small in bulk and as a whole so admirable in achievement there is no need for a time-saving choice of her

'best' book. Each has some quality or character that is endearing, though for many excellences in combination she certainly never surpassed *Pride and Prejudice*, where the elderly Mr. Bennet is in his own right as 'delightful a character' as his daughter Elizabeth; while the husband-hunting mother Mrs. Bennet, the arrogant *grande dame* Lady Catherine de Bourg, and Mr. Collins the toadying snob, are irresistibly fascinating as literary creations, and horridly fascinating as persons whose counterparts persist in every generation and through all stages of social change. Most of Jane Austen's young men, on the contrary, now seem little more than museum pieces, at any rate to male readers, though they appear to have more life in the eyes of women and were no doubt familiar in Jane Austen's world and much to the liking of the ninnies upon whom she modelled the girls who pleased her less than Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot (*Persuasion*). Indeed, there is more than a suspicion that Jane Austen herself thought D'Arcy a good match for Elizabeth, Wentworth for Anne, Edward Ferrars for Elinor, and Knightley for Emma. If we dispute that judgment it may well be because these young women are brought so attractively to life that every well constituted man regards himself as their only fit mate.

Like Peacock, Jane Austen excelled in conversational passages, many of which can stand without the aid of narrative, ready for transportation to the stage. This is particularly so with much of *Pride and Prejudice* and with whole passages of *Northanger Abbey*, where Catherine Morland's fiction-born extravagances ring the passing bell of the gothic novel without destroying our liking for Catherine herself.

By bringing the domestic novel to perfection Jane Austen also brought it to its terminus. It had nowhere further to go, and more than a generation was to pass before very different fields were opened up by women novelists in the works of the Brontës and George Eliot.

CHAPTER IX

SCOTTISH CRITICISM AND FICTION

OLYMPIAN detachment is seldom an obtrusive characteristic of literary critics who stand above the level of mere journeymen of letters, for hatreds as well as loves inevitably stir in those whose responses are sensitive enough to justify the pretensions of critical judgment. Even if criticism were based prescriptively on æsthetic standards alone, the capacity to admire good art imposes the complementary obligation to detest bad art. In the general practice of literary criticism, however, at least in Britain, æsthetic standards have been more often than not secondary to other considerations: to political, religious, moral, or personal bias. It is a common complaint that in the present age criticism has become over-polite and spineless, though in fact there is hardly less prejudice than formerly. Modes of expression have become less crude—a reviewer would not write now, as Lockhart did, 'The very concubine of so impure a wretch as Leigh Hunt would be to be pitied'—yet for a fair valuation of current criticism it is frequently necessary to allow for the critic's known, or possible, political or other doctrinal affiliations.

The assaults of the early nineteenth-century critical journals were conducted with savagery, not subtlety, though Scott advised Gifford, when the *Quarterly Review* was about to be launched in opposition to the *Edinburgh Review*, that their rivals should be kept in the dark: 'I am for gliding into a state of hostility without a formal declaration of war'.

Addison, Johnson, and other eighteenth-century writers had submitted the works of their contemporaries to detailed and well considered criticism, but the establishment of independent book-reviewing—as news and more or less mature opinion concerning current publications—coincides with the beginning of the *Edinburgh Review*.[1]

[1] Earlier notices of current books had been mainly puffs emanating from their publishers.

The 'Edinburgh', the 'Quarterly', and 'Blackwood's'

The great mass of eighteenth-century periodicals[1] had a short life, and by the end of the century all those of genuine literary quality had died away. The last of the latter, *The Anti-Jacobin; or, Weekly Examiner*, started by George Canning (subsequently Prime Minister) in 1797, had the main purpose of campaigning against the revolutionary ideas of the day, but its fame has since depended upon the verse satires and parodies by Canning and others which, e.g. in 'The Needy Knife-Grinder' tilted at Southey and in 'The Loves of the Triangles' at Erasmus Darwin's 'The Loves of the Plants'.[2] *The Anti-Jacobin* ceased in 1798, but ten years later its editor, Gifford, stepped on to a firmer and more resounding platform as editor of the *Quarterly Review*.

What, it is tempting to wonder, would have been the effect on English literature if the young Rev. Sydney Smith (1771–1845) and his pupil had not been prevented by the continental war from going, as was intended, to the university at Weimar? Instead, they went to Edinburgh, where Smith found Henry Brougham (1778–1868) and Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850), both to become great men in later years, but both at that time at the foot of the ladder. The Englishman appears to have been the prime mover in starting the *Edinburgh Review* and thereby to have fathered the family of Scottish critics. He not only contributed copiously to early numbers of the *Review*, but also encouraged Archibald Constable to persevere with it when its success was in doubt and continued to write and advise for many years after he moved south from Edinburgh.[3] Constable approved the idea and published the first number of the *Edinburgh Review* in October 1802. It continued quarterly for more than a century—until 1929. Of the twenty-nine articles in the 252 pages of the first number, three were by Brougham, six by Jeffrey, and nine by Sydney Smith, who also edited it. The original intention that the work done should be voluntary was soon dropped, and Jeffrey became the salaried editor (from

[1] See Ward: II, pp. 97–8, 133 ff.

[2] See *The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, edited by L. Rice-Oxley (Blackwell, Oxford, 1924).

[3] For letters to Constable and many to Jeffrey, see *The Letters of Sydney Smith*, edited by Nowell C. Smith (2 vols., Clarendon Press, 1953).

1803 to 1829) with paid contributors. Before Jeffrey left, the *Review* had reached its peak circulation of round about 14,000 copies. Starting with independent views, the *Edinburgh* became more and more rigidly Whig in its social and political outlook, and in literature it set itself against the poetry of Wordsworth and his friends. In the April 1808 number Jeffrey spoke of Wordsworth's 'wild and wilful aberrations from human nature'; in October 1815 of his exact copying of 'the hobbling versification, the mean diction, and flat stupidity' of the ancient ballads; while in November 1814 he had delivered the notorious verdict 'This will never do!' at the opening of his review of *The Excursion*. Later in that article Jeffrey wrote:

> Nobody can be more disposed to do justice to the great powers of Mr. Wordsworth than we are; and, from the first time that he came before us, down to the present moment, we have uniformly testified in their favour, and assigned indeed our high sense of their value as the chief ground of the bitterness with which we resented their perversion. That perversion, however, is now far more visible than their original dignity; and while we collect the fragments, it is impossible not to mourn over the ruins from which we are condemned to pick them.

He was, however, sympathetic to Keats's poetry while *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly* were condemning it. Jeffrey entered Parliament in 1831 and as Lord Jeffrey was a judge in the Scottish courts from 1834 until his death sixteen years later.

Brougham (born in Edinburgh), who became Lord Chancellor in 1830 with the title Baron Brougham and Vaux, was a man of remarkable erudition. There were so few subjects on which he could not and did not write that he was said, possibly in more than jest, to have written the whole of one issue of the *Edinburgh* unaided. He worked valiantly for the abolition of slavery, for the improvement of education, for the defence of the ill-used Queen Caroline, and for the Reform Bill. By the early 1830s his legal reputation was immense and his political eminence appeared secure, but success spoiled him and the last third of his long life was a period of anti-climax. His renown as statesman and lawyer has made him appear by comparison an inconsiderable figure in literature. His more imposing works —on education, history, and politics—are little remembered

beside his activities in connection with the *Edinburgh Review*. The article in the January 1808 issue on Byron's *Hours of Idleness* which stung the poet to reply in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* is attributed to Brougham. In Peacock's *Crotchet Castle* (ch. II), the Rev. Dr. Folliott alludes to him as

> . . . a learned friend who is for doing all the world's business as well as his own, and is equally well qualified to handle every branch of human knowledge. I have a great abomination of this learned friend; as author, lawyer, and politician, he is *triformis*, like Hecate: and in every one of his three forms he is *bifrons*, like Janus; the true Mr. Facing-both-ways of Vanity Fair.

Sir Walter Scott wrote for the *Edinburgh* between 1803 and 1806, discontinuing because he had become disgusted by its hardening Whiggism. John Murray, publishing in London, had already sounded Canning about the possibility of starting a Tory quarterly, but no progress was made until Scott supported Murray's scheme, though he declined the offer of the editorship and induced Gifford to accept it. The *Quarterly Review* began its still unfinished career in February 1809. Scott gave much sound editorial advice to Gifford in the letter of the preceding 25 October, cited above, and indicated his own notions of the new journal's aim and purpose:

> It would not certainly be advisable that the work should at its outset assume exclusively a political character. On the contrary the articles upon science and miscellaneous literature ought to be such as may challenge comparison with the best of contemporary reviews. But as the real reason of instituting the publication is the disgusting and deleterious doctrine with which the most popular of these periodical works disgraces its pages, it is essential to consider how opposite and sounder principles can be most advantageously brought forward.

But he added that their advocacy must not be carried to the point at which they would appear to be tied to a single cause: 'Such indiscriminate support and dereliction of independence would prejudice both ourselves and our cause in the eye of the public'.

William Gifford (1756–1826) had begun life far from the sphere of literature, as the son of a glazier of Ashburton, Devon,

and was apprenticed to a shoemaker until a patron sent him to Exeter College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1782. In 1794 he wrote *The Baviad* and in 1795 *The Maeviad*, satires on the Della Cruscan school of poetry.[1] He translated Juvenal's satires in a version still current, and produced editions of Ben Jonson and other seventeenth-century playwrights.

As editor of the *Quarterly* Gifford had difficulties with his authors, whose contributions he subjected to strict supervision and often to heavy revision, but his ability and fitness for the chair was patent and, after a shaky beginning, the new *Review* achieved a circulation equal to that of the *Edinburgh*. If Gifford was even more obtuse to Keats's genius than Jeffrey was to Wordsworth's, he nevertheless printed the article by Scott on *Emma* which was the first influential encouragement received by Jane Austen, and he made an interesting and praiseworthy innovation by admitting the author's own (not altogether favourable) review of Scott's novels, a leading fault in them being (wrote Scott) 'the total want of interest' in the characters of the heroes, 'all brethren of a family—very amiable and very insipid . . .'. Gifford hated Radicals, and the *Quarterly* became a stronghold of conservative opinion. He retired from the editorship in 1824, being succeeded for a while by Coleridge's nephew, and then in 1825 by Lockhart, already well trained through his connection with *Blackwood's*.

Whereas the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* were in a strict sense *reviews* of current politics and literature, *Blackwood's* was a magazine admitting a variety of contents, creative as well as critical. It started as the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* in the early part of 1817, edited by two obscure and unenterprising men whom the publisher, William Blackwood, dismissed when six miserable numbers had appeared. The title was altered to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in October 1817, under which name it has survived all changes of taste throughout nearly a

[1] The tenuous repute of the English Della Cruscans is only held together by Gifford's satires. Robert Merry (1755–98), their leader, belonged to the Accademia Della Crusca (in Florence), which took its name and its badge, a sieve, from its intention to improve or preserve the native language by sifting away the 'chaff'. The English Della Cruscans wrote puerile and pompously precious verse.

century and a half. Blackwood engaged John Wilson (1785–1854) and John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854) to take editorial control of the magazine, and with them were associated, later, James Hogg[1] and William Maginn (1793–1842).[2] The magazine immediately ran into what threatened for a while to be serious trouble by publishing in the first number a satire in biblical prose which masqueraded as a translation of an ancient Chaldee manuscript. It contained 'the whole panorama of the town' and legal action was threatened by at least one of the affronted citizens, who was expensively compensated out of Court. But *Blackwood's* survived 'The Chaldee MS.' and achieved brilliance, if also occasional brutality (as in 'The Cockney School of Poetry' articles), under Wilson and Lockhart's charge. The most famous sequence of contributions to its pages was *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, devised by the editors in collaboration with Hogg, and with Maginn, who was probably the originator of the idea of a serial in the form of imaginary conversations in the convivial atmosphere of Ambrose's Tavern. In the *Noctes* Wilson (the principal author) used the pseudonym Christopher North; Hogg appears as the Ettrick Shepherd; Maginn as Ensign O'Doherty.

The policy of anonymity followed in the *Reviews* and *Blackwood's* makes the authorship of the contributions uncertain except where they are identifiable from other evidence. In a self-congratulatory preface to volume XIX of *Blackwood's* (January 1826), it was disingenuously denied that 'the moral Satyrists in this Magazine ever wished to remain unknown'; their abuse of Byron and others ('Remember how we bearded Byron in his Den . . .') was gloried in, and though an attempt was made to explain away the attack on Keats it led the prefacer into further insults. Lockhart's *penchant* for wounding criticism led to his being known as 'The Scorpion'[3] and he set a pattern for *Blackwood's* strictures even when he may not himself have been their author. The magazine could on occasion speak with

[1] See above, pp. 43–4.

[2] Maginn, of Irish birth and education, started *Fraser's Magazine* in 1830. It had Coleridge, Lockhart, Carlyle, and Thackeray among its contributors, was transferred to Longmans in 1863, and ran until 1882. Maginn was the model for Captain Shandon in Thackeray's *Pendennis*.

[3] The nickname came from Lockhart's description of his own character as critic: 'a scorpion that delighteth to sting the face of men'.

25. Title-page of *Critical Essays* by Leigh Hunt

CRITICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

PERFORMERS OF THE LONDON THEATRES,

INCLUDING

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE PRACTISE AND GENIUS OF THE STAGE

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE THEATRICAL CRITICISMS IN THE WEEKLY PAPER CALLED THE NEWS

Respicere exemplar vitæ morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatorem, et vivas hinc ducere voces.
HORACE

LONDON.

PRINTED BY AND FOR JOHN HUNT, AT THE OFFICE OF THE NEWS, 23, BRYDGES-STREET, STRAND.

1807.

26. Illustration to *Sir Hornbrook* by Peacock

27. Sir Walter Scott by Sir William Allan

28. Scene from Scott's *Peveril of the Peak* by Alexander Fraser

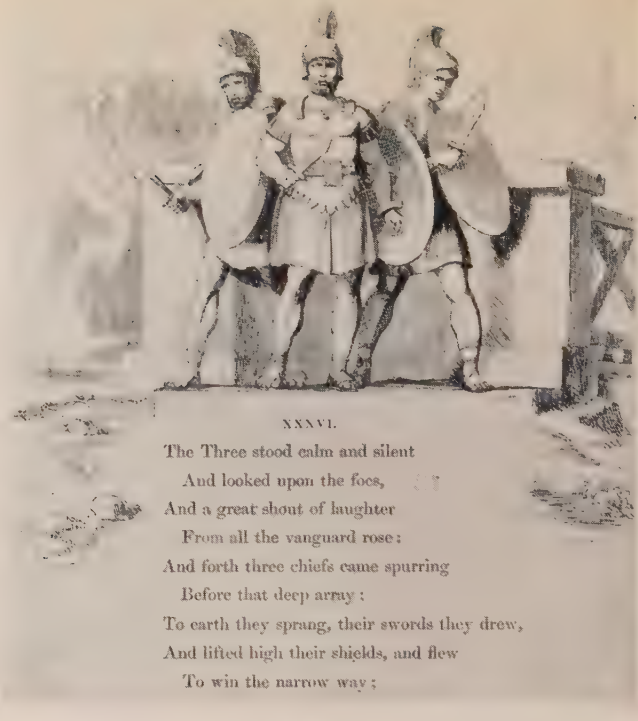
29. Illustration to Moore's *Lalla Rookh* by R. Westall

30. Illustration to *The Lay of St. Nicholas* from *The Ingoldsby Legends*

31. Jane Austen by her sister

32. View of Lake Windermere by William Gilpin

33. Page from Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*



XXXVI.

The Three stood calm and silent
And looked upon the foes,
And a great shout of laughter
From all the vanguard rose:
And forth three chiefs came spurring
Before that deep array:
To earth they sprang, their swords they drew,
And lifted high their shields, and flew
To win the narrow way;

34. *August* from Clare's *Shepherd's Calendar* after P. de Wint

35. John Ruskin by Sir John Millais

36. *Work* by Ford Madox Brown

a double voice, the one æsthetic, the other moral: as in the review of Byron's *Don Juan* (August 1819):

> That Lord Byron has never written any thing more decisively and triumphantly expressive of the greatness of his genius, will be allowed by all who have read his poem. That (laying all its manifold and grievous offences for a moment out of our view) it is by far the most admirable specimen of the mixture of ease, strength, gayety, and seriousness extant in the whole body of English poetry, is a proposition to which . . . very few of them will refuse their assent. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . It appears . . . as if this miserable man, having exhausted every species of sensual gratification—having drained the cup of sin even to its bitterest dregs, were resolved to show us that he is no longer a human being, even in his frailties; but a cool unconcerned friend, laughing with a detestable glee over the whole of the better and worse elements of which human life is composed—treating well nigh with equal derision the most pure of virtues, and the most odious of vices—dead alike to the beauty of the one, and the deformity of the other—a mere heartless despiser of that frail but noble humanity, whose type was never exhibited in a shape of more deplorable degradation than in his own contemptuously distinct delineation of himself.

Lockhart moved to the editorial chair of the *Quarterly Review* in 1825 and stayed until 1853. His fame rests upon his *Life of Scott* (1838), one of the few great biographies in English. He also wrote a *Life of Burns* (1828), some forgotten novels, and a latterly resuscitated work[1] *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* (1819), sketches and reminiscences of contemporary Scottish notabilities and places. This entertaining and informative book, Lockhart's first, was published anonymously and purported to be travel letters written by a Welshman, Dr. Peter Morris, visiting Scotland and meeting most of those with whom Lockhart was himself familiar.

Scott

Many of the later estimates of Sir Walter Scott's work, even when written sympathetically and by his own countrymen,

[1] The original three-volume edition contained rather more than seventy letters. A selection from thirty-five of these, introduced by C.P.H., is in the Nelson Classics (London and Edinburgh, 1952).

enlarge upon his shortcomings as poet and novelist. His genius is acknowledged or emphatically proclaimed, yet often with an air of perplexed defiance, as if with some inner suspicion that the man who could not do—or at least did not do—so many things upon which the creation of literary masterpieces is said in the copy books of criticism to depend, nevertheless did produce masterpieces with a tireless and prodigal hand. Scott's powers were such as can command an intent and appreciative audience only in expansive times and in an atmosphere of optimistic innocence of mind. An introverted generation is not delighted, it is more inclined to be disgusted, by extroverted literature: a taste for the tormented and diseased mentality of a Kafka does not co-exist with a liking for the abounding healthfulness of a Scott.

Scott was the greatest pageant-master in all literature. His genius was visual. He delighted to create on a large scale upon extensive surfaces; he did not care to dig. We, on the contrary, are a generation of diggers. Given a little hole, we seek in it, certain that, sometime, we will find the key to the meaning of life and the mystery of the universe. If the charge that Scott was superficial means anything, it means that his genius drew more freely from the upper air than from subterranean sources; it means that his genius though profuse and extensive was shallow-rooted. Yet the roots hold and the tree stands.

Scott loved people, individual men and women. He talked, we might say hobnobbed, with all sorts, and by so doing acquired the wide knowledge of humanity evident in his novels. Had he been less sociable, more selective in personal contacts, he might have known more about fewer kinds. He surveyed a vast area of space and time and was fascinated far more by the past as a pictorial scene of action than as the womb of psychological man.

As a poet Scott had many competitors and not a few superiors. As a historical novelist he had the field virtually to himself and was able there to exercise his talents without the challenge he encountered in verse: he had been driven from that field, he said, in consequence of Byron's aptitude in description of the stronger passions and in deeper-seated knowledge of the human heart.

To make that change of literary medium when he had almost

reached his middle forties was perhaps less venturesome than it might seem, for large-scale narrative had been Scott's strongest suit in twelve years of verse writing, and since he had an inexhaustible flow of words the change from poems to novels released him from the restriction of metre and rhyme. Though as a novelist he established a new genre, he had already gone some way towards learning the trade. The innate antiquarian tendency touched into action by Scott's early reading of Percy's *Reliques* found a prose stimulus in his reading of the gothic novels of Horace Walpole, 'Monk' Lewis, and Mrs. Radcliffe,[1] but any tendency to follow them into melodramatic excess was no doubt offset by close reading of Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, and others for his prefaces to Ballantyne's Novelists Library (1821–4; reprinted as *Lives of the Novelists*).

While the declining sales of his later poems and the impression that Byron was supplanting him caused Scott to concentrate on novel-writing, he had begun *Waverley* in 1805, before Byron had published at all, and when his own career as a poet was beginning with the appearance of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. A friend's unfavourable opinion of the first chapters of *Waverley* led Scott to put them away and it was not until 1814 that the novel at length appeared, and not until 1827 did Scott openly declare himself to be the author of the Waverley Novels, though his friends had long been cognizant of the fact. *Waverley* sold some 5,000 copies in the first six months, and thereafter, until Scott's death eighteen years later, novel followed novel with almost incredible speed, nearly thirty in all,[2] besides non-fictional works.

He was made a baronet in 1819, but his fame and success were overshadowed when in 1826 he became involved in the financial disaster which overtook the interlocked publishing and printing businesses of Archibald Constable and James

[1] Scott contributed to Lewis's *Tales of Wonder* (1801) some ballads which he had issued in a privately circulated pamphlet as *Apology for Tales of Terror* (1799).

[2] Scott's principal novels are, besides *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), *Ivanhoe* (1819), *The Monastery* (1820), *Kenilworth* (1821), *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), *Quentin Durward* (1823), *Redgauntlet* (1824), *The Talisman* (1825), *Woodstock* (1826), *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828).

still a prince, unaccustomed to contradiction, far less to contempt, and his self-pride felt, for the moment, wounded to the quick. With a hasty step he plunged into the chase, only remembering his own safety so far as to choose the deeper and sequestered avenues, where, walking on with the speedy and active step, which his recovery from fatigue now permitted him to exercise according to his wont, he solaced his purpose of revenge, by devising schemes of revenge on the insolent country coquette, from which no consideration of hospitality was in future to have weight enough to save.

The ~~Adventurer~~ passed

"The dial-stone, mossy and green,"

without deigning to ask it a single question; nor could it have satisfied his curiosity, for no sun happened to shine at the moment. ~~The disguised Prince~~ hastened forward, ~~adjusting~~ his cloak ~~so as to hide the lower part of his face, as was usual with men of that period when they were not desirous to be particularly recognised, and~~ was soon involved in the deep and dim alleys of

Ballantyne, the latter having been in partnership with Scott since 1809. Scott's credit had been pledged by the others in reckless fashion and in the ensuing bankruptcy the debts charged to him were much over £100,000. He refused offers of financial aid and set himself by unceasing labour to pay the creditors in full, a purpose completed by the posthumous sale of his manuscripts.

The overshadowing of Scott's individual genius in the twentieth century is a piece of historical victimization: the present has become in two World Wars more heroic and more glorious than the past, yet heroism and glory have been 'found out' by a disillusioned generation. The great causes of the past which gave life and romantic glamour to many of Scott's novels have become suspect in the light of the 'great causes' for which multitudes have suffered and died in our time and which have become belittled by a common feeling that history is more often made by political skulduggery than by any inevitable clash of mighty opposites. Jacobites and Covenanters and the rest have been passed under the raking eyes of those who have become accustomed to find mean motives behind a façade of inspiring events, and such admiration as may now be given to Scott is denied his own conviction that 'one crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name'.

With scene and action thus dimmed, what remains until such time as romance and heroism are again exalted? Scott had no great opinion of the young men in his novels, and his heroines are cut to the pattern of his own idea of womanly virtue; if they are not too good to be true they are certainly too good to be interesting. Of his 'good' people the most convincing is Louis XI of France in the wholly admirable *Quentin Durward.* He excelled in drawing characters who are out of the common rut—humorous, eccentric, or distraught—Meg Merrilies, Dandy Dinmont, Dominie Sampson (*Guy Mannering*);[1] Caleb

[1] Sydney Smith's letters (see above, page 140, note 3) contain many acute observations on Scott's novels, of which he customarily received early copies. Though a warm admirer ('When I get hold of one of these novels, turnips, sermons, and justice-business are all forgotten', he wrote to Constable on 28 June 1819), Smith was acutely perceptive of Scott's limitations, remarking particularly upon his repetition of similar characters: 'Meg Merrilies appears afresh in every novel' (3 Sept. 1820); 'Pray let us have no more Dominie Sampsons' (26 Jan. 1821).

Balderstone (*The Bride of Lammermoor*); Dickie Sludge (*Kenilworth*); Madge Wildfire in *The Heart of Midlothian*, perhaps his masterpiece, where also in Jeanie and Effie Deans he showed his skill in the creation of characters tragically or pathetically waylaid by circumstance.

In descriptive power Scott has rarely been equalled, not only in show pieces like the attack on the Tolbooth (city jail) in *The Heart of Midlothian* but also in such passages as the quiet prospect of the city of Edinburgh at the opening of chapter VIII in the same novel, or the (very different) account of Alsatia, the criminals' sanctuary beside the Temple, at Whitefriars, London, in chapter XVII of *The Fortunes of Nigel*:

> . . . the houses . . . exhibited the lamentable signs of having become ruinous while they were yet new. The wailing of children, the scolding of their mothers, the miserable exhibition of ragged linens hung from the windows to dry, spoke the wants and distresses of the wretched inhabitants; while the shouts of complaint were mocked and overwhelmed in the riotous shouts, oaths, profane songs, and boisterous laughter that issued from the alehouses and taverns, which, as the signs indicated, were equal in number to all the other houses; and, that the full character of the place might be evident, several faded, tinselled, and painted females looked boldly at the strangers from their open lattices, or more modestly seemed busied with the cracked flower-pots, filled with mignonette and rosemary, which were disposed in front of the windows to the great risk of the passengers.

The richness and precision of detail in Scott's novels, as in Dickens's, too often goes unheeded as the story sweeps along. The ability to tell a story is the novelist's prime and golden virtue, a virtue carried to excess by Scott who, giving God's plenty, gave more than posterity cares to assimilate.

John Galt

Time has buried a great deal of Scott's total output, and it would have been better for his after-fame if less had been too good for burial: with, say, no more than half-a-dozen of his novels to cope with, latter-day readers might have had the patience to discover his merits. John Galt (1779–1839) also wrote voluminously, though hardly so by Scott's measure, and

he has been fortunate in having most of the ephemera swept away, leaving only the four novels which give him a safe niche in literature. He was born at Irvine in Ayrshire and worked for a while in the Custom House at Greenock before moving to London and entering Lincoln's Inn, afterwards travelling (1809) on the Continent and in the Levant, part of the time with Byron. After service as secretary of a land company in Canada (1824, 1826),[1] followed by a term in the debtor's prison in London, the rest of his life was mainly occupied with miscellaneous writing. His surviving novels were written before he went to Canada: *The Ayrshire Legatees* (1821), *Annals of the Parish* (1821), *The Entail* (1823), *The Provost* (1824), excellent studies of Scottish life and character both in its humorous and in its darker aspects. Galt projected *Annals of the Parish* some years before it was completed and for longer still before it was published, Constable having refused it about 1813, leaving Blackwood to bring it out after *The Ayrshire Legatees* had been well received. The author's original purpose in the *Annals* was to 'write a book that would be for Scotland what *The Vicar of Wakefield* is for England' and to provide a Scottish counterpart of Goldsmith's Dr. Primrose in the Rev. Micah Balwhidder, who is posed as the writer of *Annals* in the form of an autobiographical chronicle of the parish of Dunmailing during his ministry, 1760–1810. The highly-praised chapter XLVII on the death of Mr. Cayenne who came to the parish over twenty years before, daringly presents the dying man in a spirit of farcical humour which not only has no offence in it but achieves pathos and dignity; Cayenne, an American loyalist, has earlier been described as 'an etter-cap, a perfect spunkie of passion, as ever was known in town or country'. He comments caustically on the minister's prayers when receiving his last visit, but he makes a good end:

> 'I have no doubt, doctor, given much offence in the world, and oftenest when I meant to do good; but I have wilfully injured no man, and as God is my judge, and His goodness, you say, is so great, He may, perhaps, take my soul into His holy keeping.' In saying which words, Mr. Cayenne dropped his head upon his breast, his breathing ceased, and he was wafted out of this world with as little trouble as a blameless baby.

[1] See above, p. 45.

Galt did not regard *Annals of the Parish* as a novel but as a record of actual life. While it is his most enjoyable book, deserving a higher reputation than it already has, his most ambitious fictional work is *The Entail*, a sombre story of a disinherited heir, relieved by a liberal vein of Galt's humour, in which the Scots dialect is as much in keeping with the environment and atmosphere as peat smoke from a cottage hearth.

CHAPTER X

LESSER VERSE AND PROSE, 1810–1840

That the Victorians were more the inheritors than the originators of the peculiar brand of morality, piety, and sanctimony which set their children's teeth on edge has already been made apparent in the discussion of Hannah More, Mrs. Barbauld, and others (see above, ch. IV). The concern for immature minds and for the protection of the English family against the intrusion of ugly facts, or even of wholesome and enlivening ones relating to physical love, produced on the one hand a mass of soft-centred literature for children—such as *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818; parts II and III, 1842, 1847) by Mrs. Mary Sherwood (1775–1851)—and on the other hand *The Family Shakespeare* (1818) emasculated by Thomas Bowdler (1754–1825), who also prepared an edition (published 1826) of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 'with omissions of passages of an irreligious or immoral tendency', and who now has as his only memorial the derisive term 'to bowdlerize'.

Queen Victoria might not herself have become a 'Victorian' if she had not married (1840) the German Prince Albert who combined with much worthiness and intelligence the humourless puritanism which was to have a leading part in the drama of Victorian life, a drama far more complex in actuality than as it has appeared to later observers (see below, ch. XII).

In the thirty years covered by the present chapter, the years from the appearance of Shelley's earliest poems up to the marriage of the Queen, most of the great Victorians began to publish, though it was not until the 1840s that there came a more or less simultaneous profusion of masterpieces. The Oxford Movement simmered or festered (the choice of word is a matter for dogmatists) from 1833 onward, contemporaneously both with Darwin's collection of material upon which were based the evolutionary theories that shook the Victorian strongholds of faith and with the geological studies of Sir Charles

Lyell[1] and others which led to conclusions equally abhorrent to the orthodox.

While such high matters of religion and science engaged the convictions and the passions of the learned, an undisturbed satisfaction was found by a multitude of others in the versified platitudes of Martin Tupper (1810–89) whose *Proverbial Philosophy* (1838; continued in '42, '67 and '76), the work of an Oxford scholar, often reads like a parody of The Book of Proverbs.

> Behold that daughter of the world: she is full of gaiety and gladness;
> The diadem of rank is on her brow, uncounted wealth in her coffers.
> She tricketh out her beauty like Jezebel, and is welcomed in the courts of kings;
> She is queen of the fools of fashion, and ruleth the revels of luxury: . . .
> So she prospered in the world: the worship and desire of thousands;
> And she died even as she had lived, careless and courteous and liberal.
> The grave swallowed up her pomp, the marble proclaimed her virtues,
> For men esteemed her excellent, and charities sounded forth her praise:
> But elsewhere far other judgment setteth her—with infidels and harlots!
> She abused the trust of her splendour: and the wages of her sin shall be hereafter.[2]

But despise Tupper as we may, it would be short-sighted to overlook the fact that popular taste and popular intelligence are more susceptible to the sententious no-poetry of the Tuppers and the Ella Wheeler Wilcoxes than to the writings of the wise and great. It is also a cautionary matter for every generation that the critical judgment of scholarly arbiters of taste is often surprisingly faulty in assessing the merits of contemporary writings. The crying-down of Shelley, Keats, and others might

[1] (1797–1875), author of *Principles of Geology* (1830–3), *The Antiquity of Man* (1863), etc.

[2] 'Of Estimating Character' (*Proverbial Philosophy: A Book of Thoughts and Arguments, originally treated*).

be charged almost wholly to political prejudice if it had not been matched by a correspondingly absurd yet sincere crying-up of inferior work. In an *Edinburgh Review* (October 1829) essay on the verse of Felicia Hemans (1793–1835), Francis Jeffrey wrote: 'If taste and elegance . . . be titles to enduring fame, we might venture securely to promise that rich boon to the author before us; who adds to those great merits a tenderness and loftiness of feeling, and an ethereal purity of sentiment, which could only emanate from the soul of a woman'. A few lines earlier Jeffrey had said: '. . . the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley, and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth, and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the field of our vision'. Yet of Felicia Hemans's twenty-five years' bulky output not more than three or four brief pieces would now be admitted by the most liberal-minded anthologist, and only a dubious immortality has been secured by her best-known piece 'Casabianca', the one-time favourite school-child recitation beginning 'The boy stood on the burning deck'. Nor has any better fate attended the poetical and dramatic works of Joanna Baillie (1762–1851), in spite of Sir Walter Scott's praise of her *Plays on the Passions* (1798, 1802, 1812), one of which, *De Montfort*, was performed with success by a company including John Philip Kemble and his sister Sarah (Mrs. Siddons). Nursery gratitude, if no more, requires mention of Jane (1783–1824) and Ann (1782–1866) Taylor, joint authors of *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1804), *Rhymes for the Nursery* (1806), and *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810), who managed to be both simple and 'improving' without being mawkish; while Jane Taylor's 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' has qualified for a miniature immortality.

Thomas Moore

A rarely equalled lyrical facility is at once the chief attraction and the main source of weakness in the poetry of Thomas Moore (1779–1852). He did for nineteenth-century Ireland what Burns will have done for Scotland as long as poems are read and songs are sung. Moore's Ireland is dead and gone, and his famous *Irish Melodies* (1807 and later issues until 1835) lack the central vitality, the genuineness, and the persuasive sincerity of tone that keep Burns's songs alive.

The son of a grocer in the Irish capital, Moore moved to

London after leaving Trinity College, Dublin, and entered as a law student at the Middle Temple. He went to Bermuda in 1803 as Admiralty Registrar, but passed that sinecure office to a deputy and returned to England after journeying through the United States. He was among the many literary crusaders against the Prince Regent and attacked him in satirical verse which, after appearing in periodicals, was published as *The Twopenny Post Bag* (1813). The repute that *Irish Melodies* had brought him in his own country was enlarged to European fame when he issued *Lalla Rookh* (1817), an oriental narrative consisting of four verse tales ('The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan', 'Paradise and the Peri', 'The Fire-Worshippers', and 'The Light of the Haram') which was as acceptable to contemporary taste as it is foreign to ours. In *The Loves of the Angels* (1823), which won him both censure and further popularity at home and abroad, he told the tales of three fallen angels in love with earthly women, subjects then regarded by some as blasphemous. Moore also wrote prose fiction, an unsuccessful *History of Ireland* (1846), and biographies of Sheridan (1825) and of his friend Byron (1830), the latter based on manuscript memoirs bequeathed by Byron to Moore, who destroyed them.

Love and Death jostle sentimentally in much of Moore's verse, and it is beset by an enfeebled Byronism. Where we look for heartfelt emotion there is often no more than emotional attitudinizing, and in place of genuine national songs we are frequently fobbed off with drawing-room ballads.

Humour and Pathos

The romantic antiquarianism of the later eighteenth century, with its love of medievalism in literature and architecture, had led to the extravagances of gothic fiction and to the fantasies of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, William Beckford's Fonthill, and the mock ruins and 'follies' set up in various parts of the country. Assuming as its general title 'The Picturesque', this fashion had numerous ramifications, including those improvements on Nature's apparently haphazard arrangements of scenery which subjected many noble estates to the operations of landscape gardeners, among whom the chief was Lancelot ('Capability') Brown (1715–83), the redesigner of the park at

Blenheim, Kew Gardens, and numerous other properties. Enthusiasts for the Picturesque did not, however, confine their liking to man-made vistas, artificial mounds and copses, and pseudo-antique buildings; some had a genuine love of Nature, particularly in those places where its wildness and grandeur were most apparent. Immediate popularity and a modest secondary fame rewarded the writings of the Rev. William Gilpin (1724–1804), author of a series of illustrated volumes describing 'picturesque tours', beginnning with *The Wye and South Wales* (1782) and concluding with *The Highlands* (1800). Another contributor to the vogue was Sir Uvedale Price (1747–1829) with *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1794).

The wide circulation of Gilpin's books led William Combe (1741–1823) to parody them in verse in *Dr. Syntax in Search of the Picturesque* (published in *The Poetical Magazine* 1809 and separately 1812), an hilarious account of the adventures and misadventures of a bizarre parson-schoolmaster and his decrepit horse Grizzle on a holiday tour. Although the text was subordinate to Rowlandson's satirical drawings, Combe's lively talent for ridicule and his skill in handling comic narrative verse have given Syntax's doings an enduring place among the lesser literary works of humour, while they also provide a shrewd commentary upon Picturesque faddish ideals. The success of this squib encouraged Rowlandson and Combe to continue their collaboration in *The Second Tour of Dr. Syntax in Search of Consolation* (he had become a widower) (1820) and *The Third Tour of Dr. Syntax in Search of a Wife* (1821), and in other works of different kinds. Apart from their inherent merit, these productions have an important place in the history of illustrated books, a publishers' enterprise which branched into other fields and through the popularity of illustrated travel-cum-sporting-cum-story literature led a generation later to *Pickwick Papers* and the ensuing fame of Dickens.

The humour of character and situation strongly veined by caricature, a combination maturely exploited by the Victorian novelists, came from the conjunction of a variety of eighteenth-century strands, distinguishable in Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, in the pictorial works of the satirical artists, and in the verbal by-play of lesser writers. Much of Dickens's humour is of a purely verbal kind: a great deal of it would disappear if, for

example, Sam Weller and others throughout his novels were separated from their catch-phrases, mispronunciations, and other such devices.

Word-play, however juvenile it may be thought, has been a recurrent if not persistent preoccupation through the ages. The Elizabethans were beset and often besotted by it; and while we currently lift our eyebrows at the punning of Lamb and his contemporaries, the punning of James Joyce is currently extolled, and recondite studies of ambiguity in language do not dwell upon its lower character as the mere word-play of labyrinthine minds.

Parody—an advanced form of punning which plays humorously upon a whole poem or prose work instead of upon a word or group of words—is at its rare best an accomplished and respectable art. A successful parody is self-supporting, a creation in its own right, not wholly parasitic. To those who know the original, the parody gives double pleasure; while for those who do not, it provides its own independent amusement. Parody is punning in depth; it calls for more than superficial parallelism and, indeed, requires both understanding and admiration of the original if it is to rise above pertness. The exacting nature of the art is implied by its rarity. The fingers of one hand are enough to count the unquestionably first-rate volumes of parody in English. The *Rejected Addresses* (1812) of Horace Smith (1779–1849) and his brother James (1775–1839) is one of the very few that have lasted beyond their day. James was solicitor to the Board of Ordnance and a provider of humorous material for the actor-entertainer Charles Matthews; Horace was a prolific miscellaneous writer, one of whose novels, *Brambletye House* (1826), had some passing success; but neither of the brothers would have any present standing in literature if they had not joined to produce in *Rejected Addresses* a sequence of parodies of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, and others, in the form of imaginary entries in a competition for a prologue suitable to be spoken from the stage on the opening night of the rebuilt Drury Lane Theatre on 10 October 1812. (In the actual competition no suitable entry was submitted and Byron was commissioned to write the prologue.) The parodies are cramped by the limitations of the single subject, but much brilliant critical fun runs through them, even if the arch simplicity of

Nancy Lake in 'The Baby's Debut, by W.W.' meets Wordsworth on his lower level. Nancy's brother Jack having melted her doll's nose and she having broken the window with his peg-top,

> Aunt Hannah heard the window break,
> And cried, 'O naughty Nancy Lake,
> Thus to distress your aunt:
> No Drury Lane for you to-day!'
> And while Papa said 'Pooh, she may!'
> Mamma said, 'No, she sha'n't!'

But she does, and addresses the audience, finishing

> And now, good gentlefolks, I go
> To join mamma, and see the show;
> So, bidding you adieu,
> I curtsy, like a pretty miss,
> And if you'll blow to me a kiss,
> I'll blow a kiss to you. [*Blows a Kiss, and exit.*]

Potentially a writer of major rank, Thomas Hood (1799–1845) was deflected from the highway of poetry by his obsession with punning and verbal ingenuity, and by emotional limitations which confined him to pathos when a sense of tragedy would have been apposite. As the son of a London bookseller he was brought up in an environment from which he graduated naturally into literary journalism, as sub-editor of the *London Magazine* from 1821 to 1823 and later as editor of a succession of periodicals, including the *Comic Annual* and *Hood's Magazine*. In volume form he published *Whims and Oddities* (2 series, 1826–7), *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* (1827), *Hood's Own* (1838), and others; while one of his two best-known pathetic poems 'The Song of the Shirt' (the other is 'The Bridge of Sighs') was first printed in *Punch* (1843). His quality as a comic poet in whose mind the farcical and the grim were seldom separated has usually been judged by 'Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg: A Golden Legend'—the title is one of his most characteristic puns—in which the heroine loses her leg in a riding accident and is finally murdered by her husband who hits her on the head with her golden artificial leg and is acquitted on the ground that since she was killed by her own

leg she committed suicide. But his sporting with words is less tediously displayed in 'No!', a poem of two dozen lines beginning

No sun—no moon!
No morn—no noon!

and continuing to the end with 'No' as the first word in each line:

No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,
No comfortable feel in any member—
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds—
November!

Hood's variety of subjects was much out of the common and even though he overstrained emotion his verse forms were precisely calculated for maximum effect: e.g.,

Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Work, work, work,
Like the Engine that works by Steam!
A mere machine of iron and wood
That toils for Mammon's sake—
Without a brain to ponder and craze
Or a heart to feel and break![1]

and

One more Unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young, and so fair![2]

and

For when the morn came dim and sad—
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours![3]

[1] 'The Song of the Shirt.' [2] 'The Bridge of Sighs.'
[3] 'The Death-Bed.'

Yet if a choice had to be made between the pathetic Hood and his other part, it would be more in keeping with his special place in English verse to associate him with a quip rather than with a tear.

> My brain is dull, my sight is foul,
> I cannot write a verse, or read,—
> Then, Pallas, take away thine Owl,
> And let us have a lark instead.[1]

The Rev. Richard Harris Barham (1788–1845), a minor canon of St. Paul's Cathedral from 1821 and a divinity lecturer there, turned in the last ten years or so of his life to the writing of swinging humorous verse incorporating a good deal of biting satire. *The Ingoldsby Legends* (1840) took up the strain of medievalism which had run to seed in romantic poetry of the previous generation, and treated it with a comic and grotesque touch which occasionally borders on the horrific, as in 'The Hon. Mr. Sucklethumb's Story', an account of a public hanging outside Newgate gaol which Lord Tomnoddy and his cronies went to witness but, instead, fell asleep in the 'Magpie and Stump' until the execution was over,

> So—my Lord Tomnoddy went home to bed!

After nearly a century of unbroken popularity, *The Ingoldsby Legends* have encountered a change of taste which tends to find them trivial and facile; yet, among others, 'The Jackdaw of Rheims', with its famous Cardinal's curse, and 'As I Laye a-Thynkynge', with its dying fall, are unique in kind, for the *Legends* have no equal, though *The Bab Ballads* of W. S. Gilbert challenge them in metrical ingenuity.

John Clare and Others

Charles Lamb told John Clare (1793–1864) in a letter of 31 August 1822: '. . . the uncongenial coalition of barbarous with refined phrases will prevent you in the end from being so generally tasted, as you deserve to be'. It is unlikely that Clare will ever be generally tasted, for his poetry is at once too simple and too difficult for popularity, but his reputation has soared

[1] 'To Minerva.'

in the present century and the editions of his poems and letters[1] published since 1930 have yet to bear fruit in a settled critical valuation and determination of his place among English poets. If he is below the standard of the great he is also head and shoulders above the minors. His father was a farm worker at Helpston in Northamptonshire, where as a sensitive and frail child John Clare acquired that delight in the fields and meadows, brooks and woods and winds, which provided the main substance of his poetry; but he acquired also those fears which were the first warnings of his later insanity. He was taken into Northampton Lunatic Asylum when he was a year or two short of fifty, lived more than another twenty years, and wrote many of his best poems during the time of his madness. *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* and *The Village Minstrel* (both 1821) brought him to the personal knowledge of the leading men of letters in London, where he was entirely out of his element and made a hasty marriage, which did not drive out the memory of a girl friend of his earlier life, to whom, when madness befell, he believed himself married, addressing her in poem after poem.

The burning intensity of vision in certain passages of Clare's poetry is akin to that of Van Gogh's later paintings. In 'Noon', written in his 'teens, he speaks of the 'dazzled eye' surveying the sun's 'liquid blaze' and 'scorching gleams'; and in 'Love of Nature', written some forty years later, 'the storm of roaring woods', the crash of the elements around him, 'the rolling thunder and the roaring sea—

> No matter where life's ocean leads me on,
> For Nature is my mother, and I rest,
> When tempests trouble and the sun is gone,
> Like to a weary child upon her breast.

Clare was a love poet as well as a nature poet—and something more than the common run of either—for his is a poetry of more than surface appearances:

[1] *The Poems of John Clare* (2 vols. 1935) and *The Letters of John Clare* (1951) edited by J. W. and Anne Tibble (Routledge, London); *The Poems of Clare's Madness* edited by Geoffrey Grigson (Routledge, London, 1949), who has also edited *Selected Poems of John Clare* (The Muse's Library, Routledge, London, 1950).

Time looks on pomp with vengeful mood
Or killing apathy's disdain;
So where old marble cities stood
Poor persecuted woods remain.
She feels a love for little things
That very few can feel beside,
And still the grass eternal springs
Where castles stood and grandeur died.[1]

But for most readers Clare's attraction lies in his all-the-year-round nature poetry. He found beauty in each of the seasons, and this appears not only in *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827); it is in the texture of his whole work.

George Darley (1795–1846), an unequal and often a trivial poet, was at his best in *The Errors of Ecstacie* (1822); and Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803–49) worked a number of strange and impressive lyrics with metaphysical implications into *Death's Jest Book, or The Fool's Tragedy* (begun 1825; published posthumously 1850), which exists in variant texts, with Homunculus Mandrake among its strange characters. It harks back to the manner of the Elizabethan revenge plays. With Beddoes may be linked another late Metaphysical, William Bell Scott (1811–90), best known (but too little and inadequately) for 'The Witch's Ballad'.

Miscellaneous Prose

The many political, economic, and sociological writings of this period have little claim to attention as literature, but they are part of the soil from which much Victorian and later literature grew. They belong to the territory of the socially-conscious novels of (particularly) the 1840s, and for purposes of reference the following are listed: Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) and later works up to his death; Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), *Essay on Population* (1798), *Principles of Political Economy* (1820); Robert Owen (1771–1858), *A New View of Society* (1813); Francis Place (1771–1854), *Improvement of the Working People* (1834); David Ricardo (1772–1823), *Principles of Political Economy* (1817); James Mill (1773–1836), the chief disciple of Bentham

[1] 'The Flitting', written 1832.

and Ricardo and father of John Stuart Mill,[1] *Elements of Political Economy* (1821), *Principles of Toleration* (1837); Harriet Martineau (1802–76), *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832) and a variety of other works including novels and children's stories, of which *Feats on the Fiord* (1841) is still occasionally remembered.

As verse pendants to the prose works mentioned above, note should be taken of Ebenezer Elliott (1781–1849), *Corn-Law Rhymes* (1828 and later editions), and of Southey's second wife Caroline Bowles (1786–1854) who published *Tales of the Factories* in verse in 1823.

William Cobbett (1763–1835), known chiefly as a radical politician and popular educator, produced among his many works one with lasting interest and merit as literature, *Rural Rides* (1830). He was the son of a Surrey inn-keeper and farmer, procured his own education, and served as a soldier in Florida for seven years from 1794. After leaving the army he returned to the United States, writing pro-British pamphlets there under a pen-name that, intentionally or not, suited his prickly temper, Peter Porcupine. Back in England by 1800, he founded and edited—at first in the Tory interest—the weekly *Cobbett's Political Register* (1802 onward), started *Parliamentary Debates* (1806 onward), *A Collection of State Trials* (1809 onward), and *Monthly Religious Tracts* (1821–2). His *English Grammar* appeared in 1817, *Cottage Economy* 1821, *Advice to Young Men* 1830, *Legacy to Parsons* and *Legacy to Labourers* both 1835. By 1804 he had changed his political views, becoming an ardent and fiery Radical and also taking up farming. Three years before he died he became M.P. for Oldham.

Cobbett set out in 1821 to see for himself the conditions of the farming population, and the material collected in *Rural Rides* covers his journeys through twenty-seven English counties in eight years. The permanence of the book is due to the plain vigour of its style, its forthrightness of expression, its acute observation, and the endearing prejudices which re-create Cobbett to the life. 'The order of the matter', he had said in advising his nephew how to write, 'will be in almost all cases that of your thoughts. . . . Never stop to make choice of

[1] See below, pp. 185–6.

words. Put down your thoughts in words just as they come'[1]—chancy advice for most, but it was Cobbett's own practice and for him it worked well. He digresses as a full man will, drawing comparisons from his wide experience, but his style is never a wandering one.

When he says inherently foolish things they are said with a force that makes them more refreshing than the mere good sense of unbiased writers. Praising Lady Mildmay for her activities in reafforesting her neighbourhood, he is reminded by her advanced age that her life had overlapped that of Dr. Johnson:

> . . . If her ladyship had been a reader of old dread-death and dread-devil Johnson, that teacher of moping and melancholy, she would never have planted an oak tree. If the writings of this time-serving, mean, dastardly old pensioner had got a firm hold of the minds of the people at large, the people would have been bereft of their very souls. These writings, aided by the charm of pompous sound, were fast making their way, till light, reason, and the French revolution came to drive them into oblivion; . . .

Rural Rides was the first subsequent book of its kind that could stand worthily beside Defoe's *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–7),[2] and it has not been equalled since.

English country life in its more idyllic aspect was shown in little by Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855) in *Our Village* (5 vols., 1824–32), a series of sketches and essays on people, places, pastimes, and customs in and around Three Mile Cross in Berkshire: '. . . a little world of our own, close packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorized to hope that every one feels an interest in us'. It has, of course, no Cobbett 'bite', and belongs more nearly to the school of *Cranford*[3] than to that of Defoe.

The references already made to the Rev. Sydney Smith have passed by the speeches which are a main part of his contribution

[1] See Edward Thomas's Introduction to the Everyman's Library edition of *Rural Rides* (2 vols., 1912).

[2] See Ward: II, pp. 102, 106.

[3] See below, p. 197.

to literature. He was a man of exceptional moral courage who spoke his mind without fear to bishops, statesmen, and others whatever their rank or influence; and he supported causes he believed just, however unpopular they might be with his own class or superiors. He spoke in favour of Catholic Emancipation and of the Reform Bill, and it was in his speech at Taunton in 1831 'on the Reform Bill not being passed' that his most famous single passage appeared:

> I do not mean to be disrespectful, but the attempt of the Lords to stop the progress of reform, reminds me very forcibly of the great storm of Sidmouth, and of the conduct of the excellent Mrs. Partington on that occasion. In the winter of 1824, there set in a great flood upon that town—the tide rose to an incredible height —the waves rushed in upon the houses, and every thing was threatened with destruction. In the midst of this sublime and terrible storm, Dame Partington, who lived upon the beach, was seen at the door of her house with mop and pattens, trundling her mop, squeezing out the sea-water, and vigorously pushing away the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic was roused. Mrs. Partington's spirit was up; but I need not tell you that the contest was unequal. The Atlantic Ocean beat Mrs. Partington. She was excellent at a slop, or a puddle, but she should not have meddled with a tempest. Gentlemen, be at your ease—be quiet and steady. You will beat Mrs. Partington.[1]

[1] *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith*, 2nd. edn., Vol. III, pp. 123–4 (Longmans, London, 1840).

CHAPTER XI

ORACULAR PROSE

UNDER the title 'Author into Oracle' a profitable study could be made of one of the major ills of modern literature. Few writers have shown the resolution and good sense Jane Austen showed when she declined the royal suggestion that she should attempt a novel on a grander scale than her own: she was fully conscious of the limitations of her own knowledge and experience, and by keeping to her own 'piece of ivory two inches wide' she not only won future respect but also illuminated human nature more revealingly than if she had dissipated her energies upon larger subjects. A writer's wisdom may be measured by his readiness to say 'I do not know' when consulted upon matters in regard to which 'I do not know' would be the honest answer. But it is an answer rarely given by an author either to inquiring publicists or to himself.

The oracular habit was strong in Dr. Johnson, but he delivered his wisdom within a conversational circle and kept his public writings within modest bounds: he was an eighteenth-century man of reason, living in an age when preaching was of relatively small account.

By the mid-nineteenth century preaching had resumed its seventeenth-century authority, but with a difference. The congregation was immensely larger, the intellectual calibre of the preachers did not compare with that of the great divines of the past, mass-appeal took precedence of learning; and while in opposing ways the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement stimulated pulpiteering, lay literature also became largely a preaching literature, even (or especially) when its subject matter was rationalistic, with an economic, sociological, or scientific bent. None were more earnest, none more eager to proselytize, than those who professed no orthodox faith, but only the 'religion of humanity'. The Ethical Societies which flourished in the later part of the Victorian period had their meeting-houses (one was named The Ethical Church), their Sunday gatherings, their hymnology; and the addresses to

which the assemblies listened had the character of high-minded non-Christian sermons. To 'sit at the feet' of a pastor or other teacher became the custom of the nation, and just as the Victorian child expected his father to be the fount of wisdom and *ex officio* infallibility, so the Victorian adult accorded to a select band of authors an undiscriminating respect for pronouncements which were often as random in thought as they were imposing in language. The 'average public', Ruskin declared, were ready to applaud 'a sentence . . . which may have no more sense in it than a blot pinched between doubled paper':[1] 'a sentence of Macaulay's' was what Ruskin actually specified in this contemptuous reference, unaware that many of his own most-applauded sentences may on analysis appear to be devoid of significance and to be only beautiful, melodious, and vapid. No other great writer was ever so hypnotized by the scratching of his own pen, which sent up exquisitely-hued verbal mists, as Turner's brush put on canvas luminous veils of colour. Meaning and a serious purpose from time to time break clearly through the Ruskinian mist, may indeed be always there; but the closely attentive method of reading that he commended ('if you read ten pages of a good book, letter by letter,—that is to say, with real accuracy—you are for ever more in some measure an educated person'[2]) cannot any more productively be brought to bear upon Ruskin's own prose than a search for photographic accuracy would be fruitful when looking at Turner's later paintings. Ruskin was an impressionist in language, an emotionalist in thought; neither an exact writer nor a precisian in intellect. A reader may soak up wisdom from his pages, but not by seeking to rationalize them. Much of Ruskin's writing is either sub-intellectual or super-intellectual: *which* it is found to be depends as much upon what the individual reader brings to it as upon what Ruskin put into it. But a strictly intellectual approach to Ruskin, if conscientiously followed through, will yield little.

Though there were few things upon which Ruskin was reluctant to express himself, Ruskin the oracle had always to play second fiddle to Ruskin the prose artist. This was also true of Victorian oracles in general. They are visited now not for answers to vital questions, nor for guidance in the matters of

[1] *Præterita*, I, xii.

[2] *Sesame and Lilies*, I, 15.

life and death which preoccupied them, nor even for information, but for their majestic or beautiful voices. Had Carlyle thundered and lightened less, had Macaulay been less effortlessly eloquent, had Ruskin's prose been less of a siren's song, no measure of sound thinking would have availed to maintain them at the level of renown they attained through literary art. However self-convinced the Victorians may have been that their lifelong quest was for certainty, they desired from their oracles not answers to crucial problems but spell-binding discourses. Carlyle's was a giantesque intellect; Macaulay was an enlightened and wise statesman; but it is as a unique literary stylist that each has survived. Ruskin's state was more problematic.

Carlyle

The stalwart, proud, and truculent spirit of his Scottish peasant ancestors dominated Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) throughout his long life. While he might pay due respect to rank he owned no one, not even Queen Victoria, as his superior. In the fullest sense a self-made man, he was also a ruthlessly self-absorbed egoist, albeit an unconscious one, for when enlightenment as to his own nature came to him after the death of his wife, he was desolated and his remaining works were of small account.

Born the son of a stonemason at Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire, Carlyle went to Annan Academy from the village school and, when fifteen, to Edinburgh University, leaving in 1813 without a degree. Inability to settle happily into the life at Annan had caused him to take to reading as an anodyne, whence he acquired that addiction to books which developed into an endless governing passion. His early intention of entering the service of the Church of Scotland was abandoned on his recognizing his lack of vocation for the ministry, while four years of schoolmastering at Annan and Kirkcaldy disgusted him with that profession and, after trying the law, he turned to writing as a certainly congenial occupation and a possible though precarious means of livelihood. At Kirkcaldy Carlyle began in 1816 a close friendship with Edward Irving, afterwards a notable preacher in London and leader of the Irvingites, a sect he banded together as the Catholic Apostolic Church.

The Blumine who appears in *Sartor Resartus* had her original

in Mary Gordon with whom Carlyle fell in love while at Kirkcaldy, but the affair made no progress. In 1818 he went with Irving to Edinburgh, contributed articles to the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*, embarked upon a close study of German literature, and wrote a *Life of Schiller* which was serialized in the *London Magazine* in 1823–4 and published in volume form in 1825.

In 1821 Irving had introduced Carlyle to Jane Baillie Welsh, with whom he was himself in love, though engaged to another girl. Jane Welsh, a young woman of remarkable strength of character, intellect, and wit, attracted Carlyle also, and after Irving's marriage in 1823, Carlyle proposed to her, was rejected, proposed again and was accepted in 1825, and they married in 1826. Meanwhile, Carlyle had been tutor (1822–4) to Charles Buller, later a distinguished Liberal politician, visited London and Paris, and published a translation in two parts (1824, 1827) of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.

After their marriage the Carlyles lived first in Edinburgh, then in virtual isolation and poverty at Craigenputtock, Dumfriesshire, before moving in 1834 to what was thereafter to be their permanent London home—and at length a literary salon and place of pilgrimage for admirers and disciples—at 5 Cheyne Row, Chelsea. Not until 1842, however, did they begin to know relative comfort, when Mrs. Carlyle received a legacy from her mother. Carlyle had established a growing reputation with numerous articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and other periodicals, but he had no popular following, and the first of his major works, *Sartor Resartus*, did not secure publication in Britain as a book until 1838 (American edition 1836) although it had appeared serially in *Fraser's Magazine* years before (1833–4). Innumerable other men have written in the kinds that Carlyle practised—histories, biographies, essays—but *Sartor Resartus* stands alone and incomparable. It is neither the largest nor the most imposing of Carlyle's works, but through its uniqueness and its independence of those factors—later available data and changing opinions and ideals—that have staled much of his other writings, it is arguably his greatest work. Subtitled 'The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh', *Sartor Resartus* (i.e. 'the tailor repatched') surveys an imaginary philosophy of clothes by Teufelsdröckh and presents an imaginary biography of him

which embodies memories of Carlyle's own earlier life. The central argument of the first part is that civilized man is clad in metaphysical no less than in physical clothing:

> It is written, the Heavens and the Earth shall fade away like a Vesture; which indeed they are: the Time-vesture of the Eternal. Whatsoever sensibly exists, whatsoever represents Spirit to Spirit, is properly a Clothing, a suit of Raiment, put on for a season, and to be laid off. Thus in this one pregnant subject of CLOTHES, rightly understood, is included all that men have thought, dreamed, done, and been: the whole External Universe and what it holds is but Clothing; and the essence of all Science lies in the PHILOSOPHY OF CLOTHES. (I, xi.)

Aphorisms abound in *Sartor Resartus*, while the style is the exclusively fashioned clothing of Carlyle's mind: 'Clothes gave us individuality, distinctions, social polity; Clothes have made Men of us; they are threatening to make Clothes-screens of us. But, on the whole, . . . Man is a Tool-using Animal . . . of which truth Clothes are but one example. . . .' (I, v.)

The chapters (vii and ix in Book II) headed 'The Everlasting No' and 'The Everlasting Yea' are closely related to Carlyle's own spiritual struggles and their resolution:

> . . . I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear; tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what: it seemed . . . as if the Heavens and the Earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured . . . all at once there rose a Thought in me, and I asked myself: 'What *art* thou afraid of? Wherefore like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper, and go cowering and trembling? Despicable biped!'

Thereupon he shook off fear, defied the Everlasting No which said 'Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine [the Devil's]', and embraced the Everlasting Yea: 'Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is solved; wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him.'

> . . . The mad primeval Discord is hushed; the rudely-jumbled conflicting elements bind themselves into separate Firmaments: deep silent rock-foundations are built beneath; and the skyey vault with its everlasting Luminaries above: instead of a dark

wasteful Chaos, we have a blooming, fertile, heaven-encompassed World.

I too could now say to myself: Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin. Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it, then. Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today; for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work.

Work, Courage, Truth were the watchwords of Life for Carlyle, and his forcible style imposes upon them the capital initials. And History, for him, was the lives of Great Men. Though *The French Revolution: A History*, published in 1837, roars with the thunder and flares with the fire of events, it endures by its portraits of heroes and villains. Carlyle read widely in the available literature of the Revolution in preparation for his work, but his historical sense was rooted in brilliant powers of imaginative reconstruction rather than in judicial ability to weigh evidence or to marshal bare facts. 'History', he said, 'is the essence of innumerable biographies';[1] and again, 'No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men.'[2] In his concern for Truth he was occasionally given to project his own image of Truth on to personalities where it fitted with at least some degree of inexactitude, yet for the most part his imaginative and creative penetration reached to the core of character. His method was entirely his own, however, and his imagination must carry the reader's with it if a coherent picture is to develop from the urgent prose.

Din of battles, wars more than civil, confusion from above and from below: in such environment the eye of Prophecy sees Comte de Mirabeau, like some Cardinal Retz, stormfully maintain himself; with head all-devising, heart all-daring, if not victorious, yet unvanquished, while life is left him. The specialities and issues of it, no eye of Prophecy can guess at: it is clouds, we repeat, and tempestuous night; and in the middle of it, now visible, far-darting, now labouring in eclipse, is Mirabeau indomitably struggling to be Cloud-Compeller!—One can say that, had Mirabeau lived, the History of France and the World had been different.

[1] 'On History'. [2] 'The Hero as Divinity' (*Heroes and Hero-Worship*).

On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (delivered as a series of six lectures in May 1840 and published in 1841) has lost much of its former popularity through the suspicion more recently excited by Carlyle's conception of the Great Man and his trust in a Benevolent Despotism. The chapter (III, xiii) on Democracy in *Past and Present* (1843) derides 'the notion that a man's liberty consists in giving his vote at election-hustings' and points a dubious lesson:

> . . . This lesson will have to be learned,—under penalties! England will either learn it, or England also will cease to exist among Nations. England will either learn to reverence its Heroes, and discriminate them from its Sham-Heroes and Valets and gaslighted Histrios; and to prize them as the audible God's-voice, amid all inane jargons and temporary market-cries, and say to them with heart-loyalty, 'Be ye King and Priest, and Gospel and Guidance for us'; or else England will continue to worship now and ever new forms of Quackhood,—and so . . . go down to the Father of Quacks.

To Carlyle, Oliver Cromwell was 'by far the remarkablest Governor we have had for the last five centuries or so'[1] and it was with his *Letters and Speeches of Cromwell* (1845) that he secured a wide and sure reputation as an historian. With painstaking labour he produced between 1858 and 1865 a six-volume *Life of Frederick the Great* which is, as a whole, a monumental failure, though it contains isolated passages equalling if not surpassing Carlyle's best elsewhere. As a literary critic he excelled in the 'Essay on Burns' (1828), while the *Life of John Sterling* (1851) has at a remove conferred a modest immortality upon that minor writer.

Carlyle's *Reminiscences* were issued in the year he died, edited by his friend and literary executor, James Anthony Froude, who went on to incur much contemporary odium with several biographical publications on Carlyle and his wife which were considered to lack reticence. These opened the prolonged and continuing argument about their marital relationships, which on the balance of evidence appear to have subjected Mrs. Carlyle to the strain of unsatisfied natural instincts and to have stunted her emotional life. But between two such people, in whom a powerful mutual attraction must at times have been

[1] *Past and Present*, III, xiv.

offset by its opposite, some measure of disharmony was inevitable. Whatever virtues or shortcomings she may have had as a wife, Jane Welsh Carlyle has an independent place in literature as an excellent letter-writer with an engagingly spiteful wit.

Macaulay

Gifted with a phenomenal memory which enabled him to recite *Paradise Lost* while scarcely more than an infant, Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–59) acquired encyclopædic knowledge with a minimum of labour through extensive and rapid reading. His father, Zachary Macaulay, was one of the founders of the Anti-Slavery Society and a member of the Evangelical body known as the Clapham Sect—dissenters, philanthropists, and abolitionists—who gathered at Clapham, in south-west London, where T. B. Macaulay was born. After private schooling he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, and was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn in 1826, the year after he had begun his long and valued connection with the *Edinburgh Review*, to which his first contribution was an essay on Milton. He entered parliament in 1830 as a Liberal and went to Bengal (1834–8) as a member of the Supreme Council of India, promoting education on Western lines and taking an important part in framing a Criminal Code. On his return to Britain he became M.P. for Edinburgh and was Secretary of State for War 1839–41.

For a generation or two his popular fame rested upon the verses published in *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), and an immense circulation awaited the *History of England from the Accession of James II* in five volumes (I-II 1849; III-IV 1855; V, posthumously, 1861). He was raised to the peerage as Baron Macaulay in 1857, and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Macaulay's position as historian and literary critic has been a shifting one. He did not study to be objective in his judgments and has therefore lost rank among those who are repelled by what they conceive to be his Whig and Protestant bias. Nevertheless, wrong-headed or pig-headed as he may at times have been, he holds a secure place in literature by the easy sweep and grace of his prose style. Of Holland House (in the essay on Lord Holland) he wrote:

> . . . The time is coming when, perhaps, a few old men, the last survivors of our generation, will in vain seek, amidst new streets,

and squares, and railway stations, for the site of that dwelling which was in their youth the favourite resort of wits and beauties, of painters and poets, of scholars, philosophers, and statesmen. They will then remember, with strange tenderness, many objects once familiar to them, the avenue and the terrace, the busts and the paintings, the carving, the grotesque gilding, and the enigmatical mottoes. With peculiar fondness they will recall that venerable chamber, in which all the antique gravity of a college library was so singularly blended with all that female grace and wit could devise to embellish a drawing room. . . .[1]

The *Edinburgh Review* spoke of Macaulay as the first historian who gave 'to the realities of history . . . the lightness, variety, and attraction of a work designed only to amuse', and it praised particularly—as successive generations of readers have also done—the third chapter with its brilliant comparison of the state of England before and after the Industrial Revolution. With so vast a canvas as Macaulay's *History* covers, both comprehensively and minutely, it is impossible to choose any brief representative passage, but for a short view of his method of presenting material for the reader's judgment and as a test of the validity of his critics' allegations of prejudice, the section on the Society of Jesus in chapter VI should be considered.

If Macaulay's prose is oracular it is because he spoke with authority. But he was a quiet-spoken oracle addressing reasonable men in the tones of reason, neither apocalyptically as Carlyle nor seductively as Ruskin.

Ruskin

The modern habit of approaching great writers as subjects for psychiatry may find some justification in the case of John Ruskin (1819–1900), for his extraordinary upbringing created or at least disastrously intensified certain emotional and psychological stresses which barred him from a full and normal life and contributed to his final breakdown. He was born in London, the son of an Edinburgh merchant and a rabidly evangelical mother whose aim was to keep him unspotted from

[1] By then already hemmed in by the houses and shops of Kensington, Holland House was partly demolished by bombs in World War II. The surviving wing, restored, has become a Youth Hostel and the grounds a public park.

the world by a rigid process of exclusion from its temptations and moral perils. He was compelled in childhood to memorize long passages of Scripture daily—a toil which was to be reflected in the quality of his prose style—and was taken on protracted British and continental coach journeys by his parents.

From King's College, London, he passed in 1836 to Christ Church, Oxford, winning the university's Newdigate Prize for English verse in 1839. After an interval abroad for recovery from illness he returned to take his degree in 1840, and published the first volume of *Modern Painters* pseudonymously in 1843, as by 'A Graduate of Oxford' (vol. II 1846; III-IV 1856; V 1860). Ruskin, who had studied drawing and learned the elements of art, was concerned in the first volume of *Modern Painters* to defend and justify J. M. W. Turner, whose paintings had incensed the conventional critics. (Thirty-five years later he was himself blind to the innovations of Whistler.) The following volumes of *Modern Painters* deal with a wide variety of matters, some only tenuously relevant to the original subject. In 1837 he had contributed an essay on 'The Poetry of Architecture' to an architectural magazine, and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3) developed the theme. He expounded the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1851) and published his children's story *The King of the Golden River* in the same year. The relations between nature and art provided the subject of *The Two Paths* (1859), but in *Unto This Last* (1862), once thought to be his most important book, he turned to economics, expressing views which appeared socialistic (though Ruskin was opposed to Socialism) and caused Thackeray at the instance of outraged readers to stop serial publication in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Ruskin discusses in this work the nature of wealth, wages and employment, production, justice, and a wide range of topics, concrete and abstract. His style in *Unto This Last* is tighter and more economical than in most of his other writings: e.g.

> . . . the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures. . . .[1]

[1] *Unto This Last*: II. 'The Veins of Wealth'.

> . . . That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.[1]

While such passages may seem vaguely idealistic to hard-headed economists, they avoid the sentimental absurdity which seeps into *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), two lectures—on books and reading ('Of Kings' Treasuries'), and on the education and power of women ('Of Queens' Gardens')—where, in the latter, there are such passages as 'The path of a good woman is strewn with flowers; but they rise behind her steps, not before them'.

The Ethics of the Dust (1866) opened up some elements of mineralogy in a series of dialogues between an 'Old Lecturer' and a group of girls between the ages of nine and twenty. *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866) is on industry and war; *Time and Tide* (1867) on 'the laws of work' in 'twenty-five letters to a working man of Sunderland'; *Munera Pulveris* (1872), six essays on the elements of political economy. Between 1871 and 1887 Ruskin issued a series of letters called *Fors Clavigera* and addressed to workmen: they are on many subjects—including, prominently, the author himself—but their main intention was the spread of social justice and public enlightenment. Finally, from 1885 to 1889, he published autobiographical fragments with the general title *Præterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts perhaps worthy of Memory in my Past Life.*

In 1848 Ruskin had married Euphemia Gray, he being twenty-nine, she some ten years younger. His mother's domination, his own consequent psychological unbalance, and, possibly, physical incapacity prevented a normal marital relationship. The marriage was annulled in 1855 on his wife's petition, and she subsequently married happily and bore a large family to John Everett Millais, who progressed socially from leadership of the Pre-Raphaelites to the presidency of the Royal Academy. Thereafter Ruskin's deeper affections were engaged only by young girls, and from 1858 to 1875 he was obsessed by devotion to Rose La Touche, thirty years younger than himself, whom he sought unavailingly to marry. He

[1] *Unto This Last*: IV. 'Ad Valorem'.

inherited from his father in 1864 a very large fortune from which he contributed to various philanthropic causes and in 1871 founded the Company of St. George, the well-born and well-to-do members of which were set to work with their hands and bidden to devote a proportion of their wealth to the general benefit. As Slade Professor of Art at Oxford (1870–9; 1883–4) Ruskin gave and published many lectures. He settled at Coniston in the Lake District and died there, his last twenty-two years (1878–1900) darkened by intermittent insanity.

To the majority, both in his lifetime and at periods since his death, Ruskin has ranked as a great man, a great teacher, and a great master of prose. By a minority, however, he is as positively considered repulsive in character, confused and at least occasionally dishonest in mind, and, as a writer, inflated and largely barren of content. He fascinated foolish women and influenced wise men; a tireless advocate and revealer of Beauty, his own æsthetic taste was nevertheless uncertain and often deplorable; for much of his life a far-sighted social reformer, he was at the same time pathologically self-centred. He wrote of marriage idealistically and as if from experience, yet as a lover he was persistent, null, and absurd, and as a husband a whining failure. He was humble and arrogant, charming and sinister, righteous and satanic. He inherited a strain of madness, and his long pursuit of the woman he loved with morbid intensity—Rose La Touche—ended in her madness and his own. He wrote and spoke with the same air of confident authority about the things he had genuinely studied and the things of which he was profoundly ignorant. As Slade Professor at Oxford and as a lecturer elsewhere he held audiences spellbound even while many who listened were aware that he rambled aimlessly. Through William Morris, the most practical of his disciples, he was instrumental in furthering in art and politics revolutionary trends with which he would have had little, if any, sympathy; through Marcel Proust, upon whom 'the first effect of Ruskin . . . was something like a conversion',[1] he was godparent and something more to *A la Recherche du temps perdue*, a masterpiece of fiction which he would have shrunk from in moral horror.

In its vast bulk Ruskin's work may seem only a monument of

[1] See *The Two Worlds of Marcel Proust* by Harold March (Oxford University Press, 1948).

futility studded here and there with passages as brilliant as the gems he collected in his dabblings with crystallography, but futility produces no such fruit as Ruskin's work has borne. We may detest the man, despise his long abjection in the leading-strings of the parents who adored him as an idol yet manipulated him as a puppet from childhood into middle age, be sickened by his wandering sensibility and his feminized prose—but no measure of temperamental disaffinity between Ruskin and certain present-day readers will explain away the hold he secured upon successive generations through some personal magnetism channelled through his writings, even when the writings have little hard core of meaning, are imperfectly comprehended, or are beyond comprehension.[1]

[1] Among the many books on him, *John Ruskin* by Joan Evans (Jonathan Cape, London, 1954) is outstanding as a compact yet full and balanced treatment making use of his then unpublished diaries. An account of the marriage debacle from his wife's and her family's standpoint is given in *The Order of Release* by W. James (Murray, London, 1948), while *Vindication of Ruskin* by J. H. Whitehouse (Allen & Unwin, London, 1950) presents less persuasively the opposing view, based on a hitherto withheld document drawn up by Ruskin himself in 1854.

CHAPTER XII

THE VICTORIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

One of the irritating characteristics of the Victorian Age is its refusal to be covered by any of the commendatory or derogatory labels from time to time attached to it. It was an Age of Faith and an Age of Doubt; an Age of Morality and of Hypocrisy, of Prosperity and Poverty, of Idealism and Materialism, of Progress and Decline, of Splendour and Squalor. It was a solemn age, yet it produced more humorous writers than any other single period; it was advanced in intellect yet immature in emotion. And though as an historical period it lasted for more than sixty years, disintegrating forces were pecking at its foundations forty years or more in advance of Queen Victoria's death in 1901: e.g. Swinburne's first series of *Poems and Ballads* came out in 1866, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* in 1872; and though *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* were still some twenty years away, Thomas Hardy published the first of his novels in 1871, while a wholly anti-Victorian pessimism saturated *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874) by James Thomson ('B.V.').[1]

Nor does the recorded earlier history of the reign show the Queen herself as an integrating mother of her people. After a short pupillary phase under Lord Melbourne's guidance from her accession in June 1837 to the time of her marriage in February 1840, her energies were divided between a succession of childbirths, the restive management of changing ministerial advisers, and endeavours to prevent Continental affairs shaping to the disadvantage of her Germanic relatives. She experienced bouts of popular disfavour, and five attempts were made to assassinate her between 1840 and 1882. On the death of her husband in 1861 she went into retirement, and was scoffingly nicknamed 'the widow of Windsor' until she reappeared at public functions years later. The growth of anti-monarchical and pro-republican sentiment was only checked

[1] The works named here are considered below: chs. XVII and XIX.

by the popular acclaim which attended Victoria from the time of her first Jubilee in 1887 and rose to its climax at the Diamond Jubilee of 1897. She and the nineteenth century expired together, for the new century was less than a month old when she died.

If the Victorian Age was so diversified, what common factors can be distinguished to justify the much-bandied term 'Victorianism'?

Dickens's Lady Bowley in 'The Chimes' sets her village men and boys singing

> O let us love our occupations,
> Bless the squire and his relations,
> Live upon our daily rations,
> And always know our proper stations.

Knowledge and acceptance of one's proper station was a basic, or even *the* basic, element in Victorianism: the acceptance of Authority—the authority of the Church, the authority of the Law, the authority of the employer, the authority of the parent. If any of these orthodoxies was challenged, the particular heterodoxy became itself dogmatic and assumed the status of a faith. Yet, notwithstanding its general if not unanimous acceptance of a hierarchy of authorities, the Victorian Age avoided the blight of authoritarianism: there was no super-authority, the State, setting up as a devouring monster. Under their God, or under their No-God, as might be, the lesser authorities ruled only in their own domain. True, the Factory Acts were curbing the authority of employers, and halfway through the reign the Education Acts began to limit the authority of parents, but these acts of social amelioration were of humanitarian, i.e. religious and emotional, origin; political economy clung to the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, which advocated the barest minimum of parliamentary interference with individual action.

Social amelioration, though a keynote of the Victorian Age, was not equated with social justice. The existence of 'lower classes' provided the 'upper classes' with opportunities for the development of virtuous conduct through the exercise of benevolence, charity, and goodwill. There is ground, indeed, for regarding the Victorian period as an Age of Philanthropy, and the fabulous life of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts is in some

respects an epitome of the age. In 1837, the year that Victoria came to the throne as a girl of eighteen, Angela Georgina Burdett, then in her early twenties, inherited the fortune of her banker grandfather, Thomas Coutts, and became the richest heiress in the land. She lived until 1906 and throughout those nearly seventy years she poured out money with unceasing benevolence, establishing and endowing churches, bishoprics, schools, youth clubs, tenement dwellings, markets, stables for costermongers' donkeys, and subsidizing industries (including goat breeding), shoeblack brigades, training ships, emigration, university scholarships, exploration, the societies for the prevention of cruelty to children and to animals, and missionary service among the poor at home and the heathen abroad. She touched every social level through either her charities or her personal friendships: she mixed with royalties, statesmen, churchmen, business men, writers, actors. Dickens was among her most frequent correspondents and advisers in the dispensing of money; the Queen admired her and made her a peeress in her own right in 1871. The Baroness Burdett-Coutts was caught, however, in the same dilemma as other wealthy and devout Victorians: she could not obey the injunction, 'Sell all thou hast and give to the poor', since poverty for herself would have effected little further material benefit to others; and the millions she did give to the poor were drops in the ocean of need. Many of her contemporaries, men and women, turned their backs on affluence at home and went abroad as missionaries; others, like Ruskin, remained tormented by the possession of wealth which they could neither fully renounce nor fully enjoy.

A great deal of the Burdett-Coutts charity went directly to Christian causes, and all of it was given on religious impulse. Not since the Middle Ages had religion seemed so important in England as during the Victorian period, and at no time had religious conflict been conducted simultaneously on so many fronts: Protestantism *versus* Catholicism; Evangelicalism *v.* Ritualism; Church *v.* Chapel; Laodiceanism *v.* Revivalism; Religion *v.* Science; Religion *v.* Rationalism. At the beginning of the century England was, to outward seeming, a settled Protestant Christian country, even if those who had taken their ideas from France formed an infidel fringe. Roman Catholics endured many civil disabilities, which were reduced by a series

of encroachments from 1780 until the Catholic Emancipation and the Catholic Relief Acts of 1829–30. Everything savouring of Roman ritual remained illegal in the ceremonies of the Church of England, but influences were developing which hankered after the restoration of pre-Reformation uses, without necessarily returning to the allegiance of the Pope.

The late eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival under John Wesley and George Whitefield had activated the Anglican Church in a limited measure and formed the great nonconformist body of Methodists, but the languishing state of religion in Britain still gravely disturbed the more zealous among the clergy, and on 14 July 1833 the Rev. John Keble (1792–1866), preaching from the pulpit of the University church at Oxford on 'National Apostasy', stirred enthusiasms which led John Henry Newman (1801–90) to launch within a few weeks the series of *Tracts for the Times* to advocate the revival of doctrines which had become obsolete among a majority in the Church of England, notably the principle of 'the Apostolic succession and the Holy Catholic Church'. Nothing but the preaching of those doctrines, it was said, would 'repress the extension of Popery'. Several writers contributed to the series, but Newman remained the chief of the Tractarians, and after he had written the last, 'Tract XC', in 1841, the logic of his own beliefs and the opposition of the general body of Anglicans impelled him to embrace the Popery he had set out to repress seven years before. He retracted his earlier opposition and was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, leaving his friends to develop the Oxford Movement into the High Anglican wing of the Church of England, from which many were afterwards to follow him. Newman's place in literature is inseparably linked with his religious convictions, for his beautifully lucid prose is preserved in three works published after his conversion: *The Scope and Nature of University Education* (1852; enlarged as *The Idea of a University Defined*, 1875), *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), and *The Grammar of Assent* (1870). His masterpiece, the *Apologia* —written in response to an attack by Charles Kingsley, who impugned Newman's regard for truth—is a spiritual autobiography of rare quality by a man whose simple and limpid literary style clothed a profound and subtle mind, a mind that appeared double-dealing and tortuous to Kingsley, who was by

comparison naïve in his Protestant honesty and outclassed as a controversialist.

Little of the voluminous polemical writing of the Victorian period, or of that which without intent provoked polemics, comes within the scope of pure literature. Charles Darwin (1809–82) published his *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the World* in 1839, but its attractions as a travel book outweighed its scientific interest in the minds of non-specialist readers and gave no warning of the thunderbolt that was to fall into the strongholds of faith twenty years later. *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) made Darwin and his theories anathema throughout the Christian community, and it was not, in general, held to be necessary to examine the evidence or to understand the conclusions in order to condemn and refute them. The 'replies' to Darwin were countless, and where unqualified refutation was not forthcoming, ingenious and ingenuous efforts were made to reconcile the parties in the Religion *versus* Science battle and to prove that Genesis and Evolution were not really contradictory.

Among Darwin's strongest supporters was Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), an ardent controversialist, an 'agnostic' (he introduced the word to indicate his own disbelief in the 'unknowable' or the immaterial), yet a typical Victorian inasmuch as he chose to deliver opinions as sermons, e.g. *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews* (1870), though he is best known by *Man's Place in Nature* (1863). Both Darwin and Huxley have had a remarkable succession of family descendants eminent in science and literature.

The roar of Victorian religious controversy was not excited only by those without the pale. Heresy charges were brought by Christian divines against other Christian divines on matters of Anglican doctrine, and also on points of biblical scholarship, into which 'modernism' was beginning to creep. Applying evidential methods of inquiry to the first five books of the Old Testament, Bishop John William Colenso (1814–83) was excommunicated (but restored to his see by the civil courts) for

publishing *A Critical Examination of the Pentateuch* (1862 and later), which reached unorthodox conclusions respecting the origin of these scriptures. The name of Bishop Colenso continued for several generations to be held by Evangelicals in more violent dis-esteem than those of outright unbelievers, while *Ecce Homo* (1865) by Sir John Robert Seeley (1834–95) was also bitterly attacked for presenting Christ as a religious reformer rather than as a divine redeemer, and for upholding Christian ethics as more important that doctrinal uniformity. A more generally influential work in its time, Seeley's *The Expansion of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1883) traced the growth of the Empire and supplied a *raison d'être* for British imperialism, which had been magnified seven years before by Victoria's assumption of the title Empress of India. Different purposes governed the historical writings of William Edward Lecky (1838–1903), whose *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1878–90) was preceded by a *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (1865) and a *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869). Sir Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), once noted for *Essays on Freethinking and Plain Speaking* (1873), *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), and several volumes of literary essays, was also the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (from 1882). He married Thackeray's younger daughter; served George Meredith as model for Vernon Whitford in *The Egoist*; and was the father of Virginia Woolf by his second wife.

Thirty years of writing on philosophical and political subjects gave John Stuart Mill (1806–73) a place of honour in the history of ideas, but his place in literature is secured by the posthumous *Autobiography* (1873). His *System of Logic* (1843) and *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) were important in their day. *Utilitarianism* (1863) expounds 'the creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle' and 'holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.' Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), *Representative Government* (1861), and *The Subjection of Woman* (1869) are classics in their several kinds, noble in outlook but often dreary in expression. The

Autobiography is most remarkable for the account of Mill's childhood under his father's educative system, which began with Greek at the age of three and proceeded with a ten or eleven years' course of unrelaxed cramming.

No Victorian writer is harder to place than George Borrow (1803–81), for no one can determine the extent to which he coloured fact with fiction. If his own account is to be believed, he mastered languages with almost magical facility and speed. Born at East Dereham in Norfolk, the son of an army captain, he moved with his parents to various military stations in England, Scotland, and Ireland until the family settled at Norwich, where Borrow became articled to a firm of solicitors (1819–24). He then went to London and worked briefly as a publishers' compiler and translator before visiting the Continent and living in Russia (1833–5), after forming the association with the British and Foreign Bible Society which took him to Spain and Portugal (1835–40) as a colporteur and provided material for *The Bible in Spain* (1843). In 1841 he had written *The Zincali*, an account of the Spanish gipsies, and it is with the Romany people that his name is firmly connected; indeed, the modern English sentimental regard for gipsies may be largely traced back to his books, particularly *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857). Borrow was a heartless egoist (see the Isopel Berners chapters in *Lavengro*) and a liar on an heroic scale; yet neither his heartlessness nor his lying can destroy the fascination that his books have, except for a minority temperamentally antagonistic to gipsies and the 'wind on the heath' life. The robust open-air atmosphere of Borrow's writings and the matching amoral quality of his own character disarm conventional judgment. Though he may be likened to Defoe in his mingling of truth and invention and in the directness of his prose style, Borrow was no one's disciple and he has had no followers who were more than bald imitators lacking all that made him a rare person and a rare writer.

The lighter side of the Victorian character appears in the humorous writings of, for example, Douglas Jerrold (1803–57) whose *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (1846) first appeared in *Punch* (founded in 1841); Edward Lear (1812–88) whose *Book*

of Nonsense (1846) and *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (1870) have made his limericks and other cherishable absurdities in verse, prose, and comic sketches more famous than his admirable paintings; Charles Stuart Calverley (1831–84), one of the best of parodists in *Verses and Translations* (1862) and *Fly Leaves* (1866); and Lewis Carroll (1832–98), who combined the teaching of higher mathematics, as Charles Luttwidge Dodgson of Oxford, with the writing of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), and *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889). He began these as entertainment for one of the little girl friends who also served him as models for many of the portraits which place him among the eminent Victorian photographers. The *Alice* books carry inspired nonsense to a point only fractionally short of superior sense, and they are in every respect unique. They cannot be over-praised, yet it has become something of a duty to underpraise them until such time as they cease to be a literary cult among adults and are returned to their rightful audience. The cult has attached an elaborate symbolism to the adventures of Alice and has turned a probing Freudian eye upon their inventor, exercises in laboured nonsense which Lewis Carroll's own spontaneous nonsense dissolves into absurdity: '. . . if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be: but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic' said Tweedledee.

CHAPTER XIII

VICTORIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS

LIGHT is thrown upon a particular aspect of Victorianism by the disinclination of most of the foremost women novelists to declare their sex. Earlier, Ann Radcliffe had shown a strong dislike of personal advertisement, but there was no general sex timidity among eighteenth-century women novelists; and though Jane Austen was shy of publicity she did not disguise that her novels were the work of 'A Lady'. The intellectual emancipation at which the Bluestockings had aimed was checked in the following generation by acquiescence in St. Paul's view of the status of women; the injunction 'wives submit yourselves to your husbands' carried the implication that daughters should submit themselves to fathers and sisters to brothers; the education of sons was a prime consideration, essential to a career and a place in the world; the education of daughters was restricted by the belief that woman's place was the home or that needy young gentlewomen might become governesses with a minimum of educational equipment. Below the middle-class level, education for both sexes was either rudimentary or non-existent. At the earliest possible age children became wage earners, their condition being only slowly alleviated by humanitarian legislation as the century drew on, particularly by the Education Acts of 1870 and later. Until as late as the beginning of World War I in 1914 even 'good' employers of female factory labour could without shame pay a wage of only a few shillings for an arduous sixty-hour week. While the 'inferiority' of women was, on the lower social levels, profitable for commercialism, it was fostered in the leisured and moneyed classes by a deluded idealism and piety, which sought through cloistered virtue to keep women chaste and uncompromised. Although Mary Wollstonecraft proclaimed *The Rights of Women* in 1792 it was still necessary for John Stuart Mill to protest in *The Subjection of Women* in 1869 against the denial of their rights; and Thomas Hardy's presentation of Tess of the D'Urbervilles as 'a pure woman' in 1891 was received with protests and insults which

exhibited far less of morality than of stupidity and muddle-minded prejudice.

The Brontës' and Mary Ann Evans's (George Eliot's) hiding of their sex had more than a single motive. When the first Brontë novels came out in 1847 Dickens had experienced some ten years of popularity, and Scott had been dead for fifteen years. But fiction, as such, was regarded by the innately puritan Victorians as a form of light-minded indulgence, however much it might in special instances be redeemed by genius or by the pressing of moral and social reflections. Certainly the writing of novels could not be recognized as a ladylike occupation. Indeed, in her early years of ardent Evangelicalism, Mary Ann Evans had herself given works of fiction a low rating, though Scott's novels had been her favourite reading in childhood. As Ellis, Acton, and Currer Bell, the Brontës dealt at once with their fear of personal publicity, with their well-founded suspicion that their manner of writing and thinking 'was not what is called "feminine" ', with their impression that critics were inclined either to chastise or to patronize women writers, and with their reluctance to commit themselves to an untruth by using positively masculine names. George Eliot's pseudonym was virtually forced upon her by the fact that when G. H. Lewes sent her first story to the publisher (Blackwood) he spoke of it as the work of a clerical friend; but she long persisted in veiling her identity, and had no intention of conforming to orthodox standards of feminine authorship: her bent, she said, was towards the presentation of 'mixed human beings', not of 'eminently irreproachable characters'.

Charlotte and Emily Brontë and George Eliot excellently requited the women of their period by writing novels which are more mature emotionally than any written by contemporary men. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is, moreover, the paramount tragic novel in English; she, and Charlotte Brontë at her best, touch depths of passion beyond the reach of other mid-Victorian novelists; and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* displays an unsurpassed power of intellectual penetration.

The Brontës

No other English novelists have been so much written-up, dramatized, and romanticized personally as the Brontës. Seen

as an almost conventually enclosed sisterhood in a parsonage bounded by grim moors and by a grimmer churchyard to which they were all too early carried (save only Anne, who died and was buried at Scarborough); living motherless from childhood with a father wedded to solitude; unhappy at school; burdened with a dissolute brother; their two older sisters dead while schoolgirls: linked with this record of calamity, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë can be made to appear as figures of doom. But through the years from 1825, when Maria and Elizabeth died, until the death of Emily twenty-three years later, the interior life of the three sisters was full and satisfying and, more than has been generally allowed, it compensated the sickness and sadness which afflicted them in physical and family matters.

Their father, the Rev. Patrick Brontë, of Irish birth and Cambridge education, held several curacies before that of Thornton, in Yorkshire, where Charlotte (1816–55), Branwell (1817–48), Emily (1818–48), and Anne (1820–49) were born. The family moved in 1820 to the parsonage of Haworth in the same county, and there Patrick Brontë served as perpetual curate until he died at the age of eighty-four in 1861.

Soon after the death of their mother, all the girls except the four-year-old Anne were sent to board at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, some miles from Haworth, where they stayed until Maria and Elizabeth died in May and June 1825. The miseries of Cowan Bridge are indicated and indicted in the Lowood chapters of *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Brocklehurst being drawn from the Rev. William Carus Wilson, the founder and superintendent of the school, where cold, bad food, and long sessions of prayers and Bible reading were designed to produce 'hardy, patient, self-denying' women. Finding that 'a lunch, consisting of bread and cheese has twice been served out to the girls during the past fortnight', Brocklehurst asks:

> '. . . How is this? I look over the regulations, and I find no such meal as lunch mentioned. Who introduced this innovation? and by what authority?
>
> 'I must be responsible for the circumstance, sir,' replied Miss Temple: 'the breakfast was so ill-prepared that the pupils could not possibly eat it; and I dared not allow them to remain fasting till dinner time.'

'Madam, allow me an instant. . . . Should any little accidental disappointment of the appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or the over dressing of a dish, the incident ought not to be neutralised by replacing with something more delicate the comfort lost, thus pampering to body and obviating the aim of this institution; it ought to be improved to the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under the temporary privation. . . . Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into those children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls.'

The brutal religious hypocrisy of Brocklehurst-Wilson was the more disgusting and deadly in Charlotte's eyes since the deaths of her two sisters were directly traceable to conditions at the school, and the moving death scene of Helen Burns in chapter IX of *Jane Eyre* embodies personal memories.

From 1825 to 1831 the children remained at home, helping their housekeeper-aunt and picking up from her and their father such scraps of knowledge as they might. During that time they invented the games which led them to write a remarkable series of adventures of the imaginary inhabitants of Angria and Gondal in a hundred or so minute homemade notebooks. These have latterly come to be regarded as of great importance for the clues they give to hitherto puzzling factors in the Brontës writings and mental make-up.[1] At the beginning of 1831 Charlotte went to Roe Head School, near Huddersfield, where she found lifelong friends in Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor, who supplied Mrs. Gaskell with much valuable material for her admirable *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which subsequent information has served to amplify but not to supersede. Charlotte went back home in 1832 and taught her sisters, returning to Roe Head as a teacher from 1835 to 1838, when she became a governess until she and Emily went to Brussels in 1842 to study languages. There, at the school in the Rue d'Isabelle, Charlotte came under the influence of Constantin Héger and conceived for him the intense admiration which disturbed her emotionally, and also in some measure his household, and gave her material for *Villette*. The sisters returned to Haworth at the end of the year, having taught in the Hégers' school during the later part of

[1] See *The Brontë's Web of Childhood* by Fannie E. Ratchford (Oxford University Press, 1941).

their stay, and Charlotte resumed her post there early in 1843, leaving finally in the last days of December. Both Emily and Anne had intervals away from home, teaching, and after Charlotte's second return from Brussels they made a fruitless attempt to set up a school of their own. In the meantime their brother Branwell had drifted from situation to situation, disgracing himself with drink and misplaced passion before his wrecked life ended in 1848.

Reunited at home from 1845 the sisters, who 'very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors', gathered a composite collection of the verses they had from time to time composed and in 1846 endured the blow of the total failure of *Poems* by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Each of them completed the novel she was writing, however, and though Charlotte's first adult prose book *The Professor* was rejected, her *Jane Eyre* appeared in the same year (1847) as Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey*. In the next year Emily died, and Anne the year after, leaving only Charlotte and her father.

Jane Eyre was an immediate success, notwithstanding the shock it administered to the conventional and orthodox. Its heroine, by her plainness and lowly station—charity-school girl and governess—controverted current notions of what a heroine should be; its genuine passion was in startling contrast to the sentimental emotionalism of much popular fiction of the day; and the relationship between Jane and Rochester had at least some semblance of the illicit. The book made its way against the tide by the force of its honesty and conviction, and by that unanalysable quality of power in the writing which guarantees eventual if not immediate admission to the company of the classics. *Jane Eyre* came out in October; in December Charlotte was writing a preface to the second edition, and in January 1848 a note to the third. In the preface she thanked the public, the press, and the publishers before addressing 'the timorous or carping few who doubt the tendency of such books as *Jane Eyre*: in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong'. To them she suggested 'certain simple truths'—that 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion'—these and other earnest commonplaces somewhat priggishly expressed.

She went on to produce in *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853)

executions which the Queen had ordered.

They very soon came upon a Gryphon, which lay fast asleep in the sun: (if you don't know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture):

"up, lazy thing!" said the Queen, "and take this young lady to see the Mock Turtle, and to hear its history. I must go back and see after some executions I ordered," and she walked off, leaving Alice with the Gryphon. Alice did not quite like the look of the creature, but on the whole she thought it quite as safe to stay as to go after that savage Queen: so she waited.

The Gryphon sat up and rubbed its eyes: then it watched the Queen till she was out of sight: then it chuckled. "What fun!" said the Gryphon, half to itself, half to Alice.

"What is the fun?" said Alice.

"Why, she," said the Gryphon; "it's all her fancy, that: they never executes nobody, you know: come on!"

"Everybody says 'come on!' here," thought Alice, as she walked slowly after the Gryphon; "I never was ordered about so before in all my life – never!"

They had not gone far before they saw the Mock Turtle in the distance, sitting sad and lonely on a little ledge of rock, and, as they came nearer, Alice could hear it sighing as if it its heart would break. She pitied it deeply: "what is its sorrow?" she asked the Gryphon, and the Gryphon answered, very nearly in the same words as before, "it's all its fancy, that: it hasn't got no sorrow, you know: come on!"

So they went up to the Mock Turtle, who looked at them with large eyes full of tears, but said nothing.

"This here young lady" said the Gryphon,

37. Original manuscript of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

38. The Mock Turtle, Alice and The Gryphon by Sir John Tenniel

39. The Brontë Sisters by Branwell Brontë

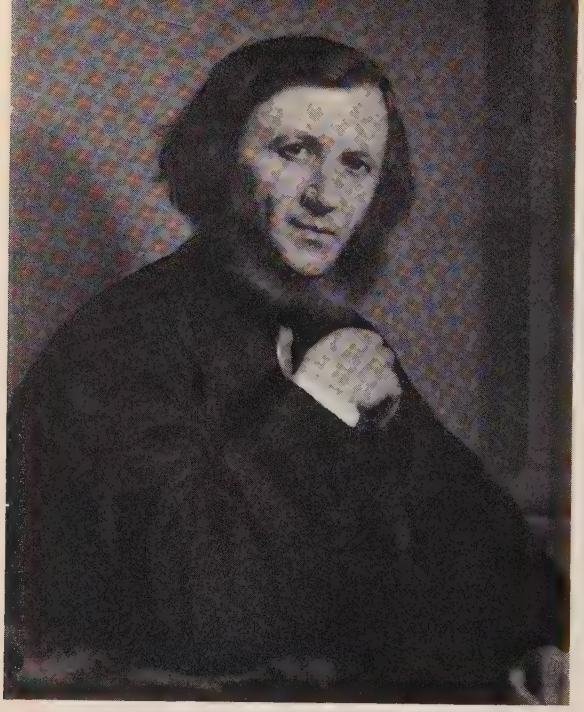
40. A book written by Charlotte Brontë as a child

41. George Eliot by F. W. Burton

42. Illustration from *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot

43 Cover for Part IV of *David Copperfield*

44. The Trial from *Pickwick Papers*

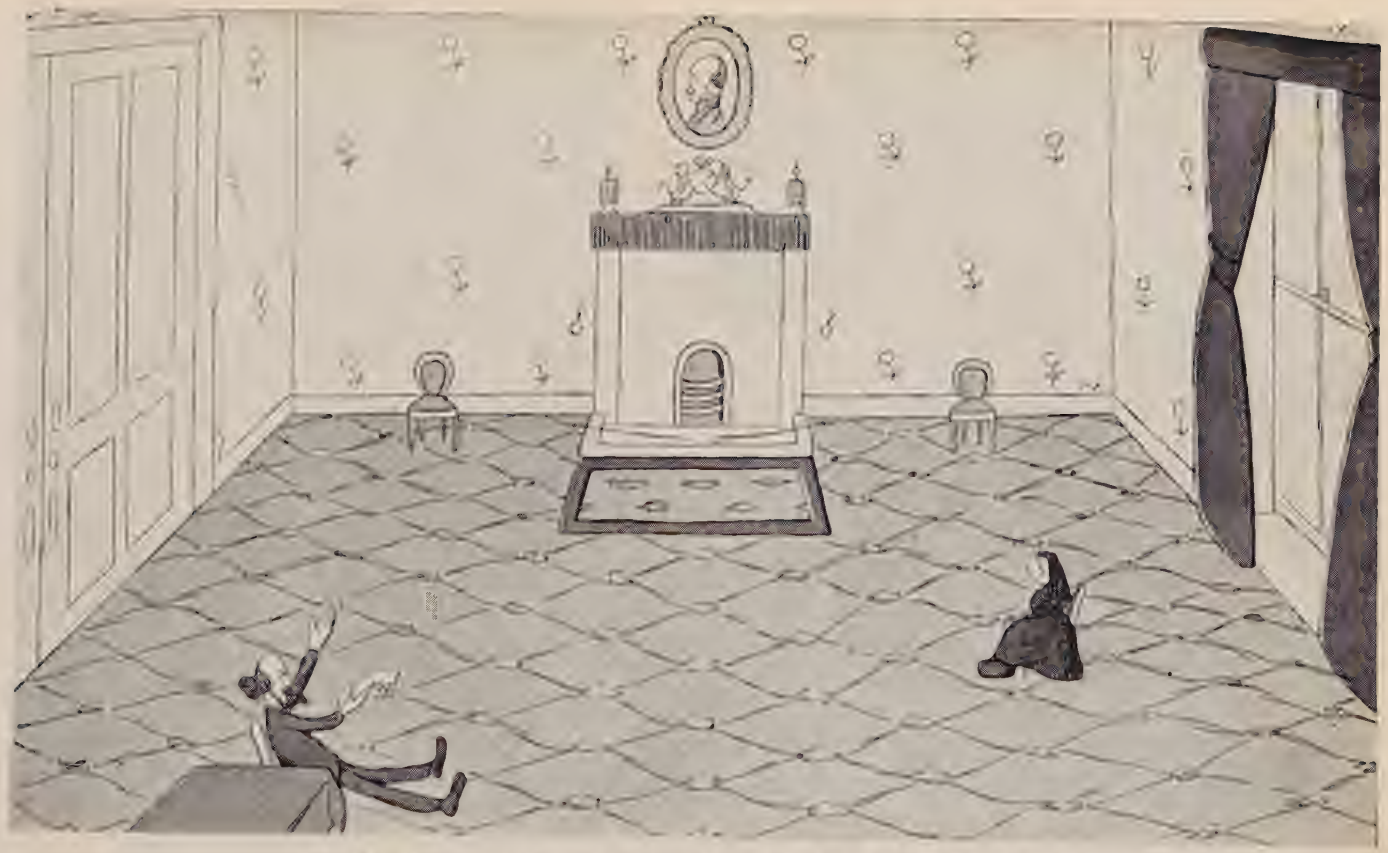


45. Robert Browning
by Gordigiani

46. Elizabeth
Barrett Browning
by Gordigiani

47. Elizabeth Siddal by Rossetti

48. Blessed Damosel



49. *Mr. Tennyson reading "In Memoriam" to his Sovereign* by Max Beerbohm

equally honest and more massive novels in which, however, the power that makes *Jane Eyre* an outstanding masterpiece of English fiction is only intermittent. *Shirley* belongs to the 'social-conscience' type of fiction of the 1840s, and its documentary interest does not adequately compensate that absence of 'livingness' which dogs the majority of the 'condition of England' novels. That *Villette* is in any serious sense autobiographical was for long denied by those who also denied that Charlotte's feelings for Héger had any passionate root, but there can be no doubt that the best passages in this over-long novel are those for which the author's emotional experiences in Brussels provided the basic material, and that Paul Emanuel would have had no existence in literature if Charlotte Brontë had not been profoundly disturbed by her contact with Constantin Héger.

Wuthering Heights had no such spectacular reception as *Jane Eyre*, but Emily's single novel is of a higher order than any of Charlotte's. It has poetic power, excelling the prose power to which Charlotte's talent was limited. Among English novels *Wuthering Heights* stands on as lonely a peak as *Lear* among English plays. Neither is a perfect work of art within its own kind, for each breaks its universe into fragments under the impact of gigantic passions. Yet, for all its complexity and apparent lack of unity, *Wuthering Heights* is in fact an astonishingly well-constructed novel,[1] though it seems likely that this was as much an unpremeditated operation of genius as was the tragic intensity of the story. *Wuthering Heights* has from time to time been speculatively fathered upon Branwell Brontë, on the ground that no woman, and certainly no woman with Emily's limited experience, could have written it. But works of supreme genius are not produced only by the worldly knowledgeable. Moreover, since Emily Brontë was also among the greatest English women poets,[2] while nothing among Branwell's scribblings has any value, her claim to the highest rank does not rest upon *Wuthering Heights* alone.

[1] See *The Structure of 'Wuthering Heights'*, by C.P.S. (Hogarth Press, London, 1926).

[2] Her only competitors in the nineteenth century are Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Alice Meynell, none of whom wrote anything to equal Emily Brontë's lyrics in depth of feeling or economy of statement.

George Eliot

To turn from the writings of the Brontës to those of George Eliot is, appropriately, like moving from their Yorkshire moors to her Warwickshire plains: it is a passage from the transports and agonies of passion to the relative calm of the philosophic life. Mary Ann Evans (1819–80) was the youngest child by his second wife of Robert Evans, land agent for several gentlemen's estates in the neighbourhood of Arbury in Warwickshire. After some spaced-out attendance at the dame's school in the village, with much longer intervals of rambling with her brother Isaac around the nearby countryside, she was sent in 1824 to boarding school near Nuneaton, where, before going on to a Coventry school in 1832, she developed a passion for reading and displayed an intense enthusiasm for the Evangelical Protestantism in which she had been reared by her father. At Coventry her religious enthusiasm found scope in various devotional and practical ways until, following the death of her mother in 1836, she settled at home as her father's housekeeper. They moved in 1841 from Arbury to Coventry, when she made new friends, in particular Charles Bray, a manufacturer, whose views undermined her faith and by whom she was led to undertake her first literary commission, the translation from the German of D. F. Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, which she started early in 1844 and finished in 1846. It was published by John Chapman, who became for some years the strongest influence in her life, and through him she obtained much literary work. She was his mainstay on the *Westminster Review*, to which she contributed frequently. She lodged in the Chapman household and established an ambiguous association with him until her attention was more healthily engaged by a friendship with Herbert Spencer which began in 1851 and seemed likely to end in marriage. But, Spencer making no offer, their friendship remained on an intellectual level and it was left for his friend George Henry Lewes to develop an emotional relationship with her and to satisfy the passionate though not evidently tempestuous side of her nature. She and Lewes settled together on the Continent in 1854 and lived happily and with mutual benefit as unmarried husband and wife until Lewes's death in November 1878, when George Eliot was just under sixty. In May 1880 she married the Rev. J. W. Cross, twenty years her

junior, 'a friend of years, a friend much loved and trusted by Mr. Lewes, and who now that I am alone sees his happiness in the dedication of his life to me'. She lived only till December, a seven-months' wife whose legal marriage was received with more widespread disfavour than her quarter of a century as Lewes's mistress, a position she had seemed to dignify. As a wife the great George Eliot dwindled briefly into a commonplace Mrs. Cross.

That Lewes—who seemed to many, and at first to Mary Ann Evans herself, a physically unprepossessing vulgarian—should have proved an ideal lover and companion for an intellectualist bluestocking is among the astonishments of literary history. Despite outward appearances, Lewes was an accomplished man: no mean expositor of philosophy, an excellent dramatic critic, and the author of a notable *Life of Goethe*. By perseverance yet with tact he induced the woman he both loved and admired to turn to the writing of fiction, and as her business man he steered her to success and affluence. When she became famous he comported himself with the highest credit, without envy and without self-abasement.

After the *Life of Jesus* she had translated (1854) Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. Her career in fiction began with the stories collected as *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) and her first full-length novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), secured her recognition as a major novelist, with an exceptional command of pathos, pity, and humour, and great skill in description and in character drawing. In this and other novels she drew upon early memories and shrewd observation of country people, and even if in *Adam Bede* the misfortunes of Hetty Sorrel have a melodramatic tinge, there is a constant element of moral austerity to serve as a counterweight. Though she reacted against orthodox Christianity—and became, to the orthodox, an infidel—George Eliot never became irreligious. Her integrity was so strong and unrelaxing that she made doubt seem more conducive to nobility of conduct than religion itself, just as in becoming Lewes's mistress she made 'living in sin' appear more sternly moral than marriage.

The first phase of her career as a novelist, taking in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861), was followed by her sole venture into historical fiction, the overstudied and heavily weighted but commonly underestimated *Romola* (1863), treating

of Florence in the time of Savonarola, and then by *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), a novel of reform in which political ideas and story element are uncomfortably associated, *Middlemarch* (1871–2), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). The last-named now takes, after long neglect, a higher place among her novels than at any time before, partly for the interest of its Jewish theme and partly for the character of Gwendolen Harleth, an unadmirable character so minutely studied as to become completely fascinating. Opinion has veered from *Adam Bede* to *Middlemarch* as George Eliot's best novel. The marriage of Dorothea Brooke the ecstatic puritan to Mr. Casaubon the elderly absorbed scholar, and that of the young Dr. Lydgate to the stifling Rosamond Vincy, are the peak themes in a brilliant work with many points of subsidiary interest. In the sweep of its thought, in its psychological insight and subtlety, in the serenity of its style, *Middlemarch* carried the English novel forward along a path followed with less vigour by Henry James, and with less intelligence and sense of direction by his imitators. The vogue of *Middlemarch* may pass or at least diminish, and George Eliot's place in literature be finally determined by the humanity and humour of *Adam Bede* and of *The Mill on the Floss* which embodies many memoirs of childhood and especially (in the character of Tom Tulliver) of her beloved brother Isaac.

Mrs. Gaskell

Posterity has chosen to regard Mrs. Gaskell as a one-book writer, singling out *Cranford* as a unique masterpiece of quaint dimity-and-lavender humour. In her own time she was, both in intention and in performance, a 'serious' and a voluminous writer, Dickens's favourite contributor to his periodicals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round.*

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson (1810–65), the daughter of a many-talented Unitarian minister, was born at Chelsea but brought up by an aunt at Knutsford in Cheshire, immortalized as Cranford. She married in 1832 the Rev. William Gaskell, also a Unitarian minister, at that time of a Manchester chapel, who became Professor of English History and Literature at Manchester New College. Mrs. Gaskell's experience as the wife of a man in daily contact with the mill and factory workers of a large industrial city bred in her a profound concern for the

injustices and miseries which prevailing conditions of employment imposed upon them. Her (anonymous) first novel *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848) was written with deep feeling for these working people, and at a time when her own emotions were fully charged by the death of her child. Although *Mary Barton* is a novel with a purpose and is passionately felt, the theme (of trade unionists struggling for betterment against inhuman employers and being driven by desperation to murder) does not swamp the story. The author's sense of character, her wide sympathies, her judicial temper and intellectual balance, raise *Mary Barton* above the level of tendentious propaganda. It is a document, but a primarily human document. Though attacked by supporters of the employers it was warmly praised by Carlyle and others whose approval brought her into friendship with the London literary circle, particularly with Dickens and Thackeray.

Of Mrs. Gaskell's later serious novels the most notable are *Ruth* (1853), the story of a betrayed orphan girl; *North and South* (1855), the troubled love-story, with industrial complications, of a girl from southern England and a northern manufacturer; *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), a sombre tale in which the evils of the naval press-gangs are a prominent theme; and the unfinished *Wives and Daughters* (1866), in which her 'subdued humour and irony are seen at their best'. Her friendship with Charlotte Brontë in that novelist's last few years resulted in Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), one of the best English biographies, though it displeased some of Charlotte's acquaintances and was revised after the first edition.

Cranford (1853), which first appeared serially in *Household Words* from 1851 to 1853, was little more than a light trifle in comparison with Mrs. Gaskell's solid problem novels; yet it is a natural-born classic and will hold its place as her enduring contribution to literature. In spite of the imposed limitations of time and place, the narrow confines of village gentility and genteel poverty, the book reaches down to truths of human nature, transforming the Jenkyns sisters, Miss Matty and Miss Deborah, from mere Knutsford spinsters into universal figures. Miss Matty may seem too good to be true, but she is not too good to be possible in Mrs. Gaskell's conception of the Human Ideal directed by pity and charity, simplicity, justice and love.

CHAPTER XIV

DICKENS, THACKERAY, TROLLOPE, AND CONTEMPORARY NOVELISTS

Rummagers in the attics to which a great deal of Victorian literature was consigned in the early years of the present century would now find empty spaces once occupied by works which have been restored to the shelves in more accessible quarters. Victorians, the bad and the indifferent as well as the good, have been rediscovered and newly appraised, charged with motives and credited with qualities originally undetected or meanwhile forgotten. The largest cleared space would mark where Trollope's novels were piled after his death, there to remain scarcely disturbed for some quarter of a century, when they were carried back downstairs to enjoy a second and more fervent popularity and a secure place among the classics of fiction.

Dickens's posthumous treatment was very different. He is the only great English novelist whose work has not gone into a temporary eclipse in the years following his death. Apart from such odd volumes as *American Notes* (1842), *Pictures from Italy* (1846), and *A Child's History of England* (1852–4), his works have remained in continuous popular demand. If they were for a time less warmly regarded by intellectuals, that time is past. Thackeray, on the other hand, is still in partial eclipse. The greater part of his work remains in the attic and seems likely to stay there: though scholars wrangle over him the general reader is largely indifferent to all but *Vanity Fair* and *Esmond*, and perhaps *Pendennis*, among his fifty or so books. Unlike Dickens, who was already famous in his middle twenties and with his second book, Thackeray had reached the middle forties and was the author of more than twenty assorted works before *Vanity Fair* brought him wide popularity and fame. Trollope's main advantage over his great contemporaries lay in the fact that he was not in the usual sense a professional author. In the course of twenty years he made nearly £70,000 from his writings, but as a salaried senior civil servant he was free from

the burden of writing for a living. Despite occasional difficulty in conforming to the prudery of current taste, he had no need to keep that registering eye upon the susceptibilities of readers which was a recurrent source of anxiety to Dickens; nor would Trollope have felt the need to introduce a novel in the self-justificatory tone of Thackeray's preface to *Pendennis*:

> I ask you to believe that this person writing strives to tell the truth. . . . Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art. Many ladies have remonstrated and subscribers left me, because, in the course of the story, I described a young man resisting and affected by temptation. My object was to say, that he had the passions to feel, and the manliness and generosity to overcome them. . . .

Passions were not of deep concern to Trollope. In literature as in life he neither scaled the heights nor plumbed the depths: he was the ordinary man in an extraordinary degree and he had the blessed advantages of his limitations—common sense and sanity, an equable temperament, and the capacity for enjoying his days to the full. Nothing more can be read into his novels than what is plain to normal intelligence: no psychological ambiguities, no symbolism, no abstruse significances, no recondite analysis of man or society. The processes of literary and biographical detection which have disturbed conventional opinion in regard to Dickens and Thackeray have revealed no skeletons in Trollope's cupboard. Without false modesty he was realistic about his work and himself. He thought it quite natural that George Eliot (as she told him) should sometimes have days when she failed to write as much as a single line, for hers was 'imaginative stuff', while his own, he said, was 'mechanical stuff' and 'a sheer matter of industry'. A sheer matter of industry it was, three hours a day before breakfast, 5.30 to 8.30 a.m.; sitting with his watch before him and requiring from himself '250 words every quarter of an hour. I have found that the 250 words have been forthcoming as regularly as my watch went . . . and by adhering [to this plan] over a course of years, I have been enabled to have always in hand, —for sometime back now,—one or two or even three unpublished novels in my desk beside me.'

When this method of working was made known in the *Autobiography* (ch. XV) published in 1883, a year after he died, Trollope's popularity lapsed for a whole generation. That a novelist should produce not by inspiration but by honest labour with his pen, that he should keep on hand a stock of novels as a tradesman keeps a stock of goods, was intolerably disillusioning and as shocking as indecent exposure. We are hardier now. But though Trollope's novels came into being through a steady process of putting down one word after another at the average rate of a word every four seconds, they were not, as he judged them to be, less imaginative than George Eliot's. His order of imagination was different from that of his contemporaries, but it existed. It was a prose imagination—the very bread-and-butter of the creative process—with no hankering after poetry or tragedy or high romance, but always on the safe side of the line between the entertaining and the dull. Trollope praised Thackeray's best novels for the signs they give 'that he lived with the characters he was creating' whereas towards the end of his career he had no such intimacy and knew them 'only when he was seated at his desk'. Trollope's strength, too, lay in his intimate knowledge of his characters. Even more than Thackeray he lived with them. Thackeray may resume acquaintance in some later novel with characters from an earlier one, but Trollope does more in the continuous maintenance of contact with a family of people in the six Barsetshire novels and with another in the six of the Palliser (or political) group, and the manner of their reappearance shows 'Trollope's skill in so drawing his characters as to depict them gradually growing older or altered in nature by altered circumstances'.[1] He lived with them so closely that he seemed to himself as less their creator than their recorder, and the act of writing as less an exercise of the imagination than a patient task of transcription. It is noteworthy that he wrote in the cool hours of the morning, not in the heat of the day nor by midnight oil.

Dickens

An incomparable endowment of natural genius served in the works of Charles Dickens (1812–70) as a catalyst to existing

[1] *Trollope: A Commentary*, by Michael Sadleir (Constable, London), 1945 edn., p. 417.

external elements. The eighteenth century and the industrial age met together in his novels and were changed into something altogether new. His addiction to caricature and fantastification of character was a transmutation into verbal and living form of such eighteenth-century pictorial grotesques as Rowlandson and Gillray had popularized. In their successors, Cruikshank and especially Hablot K. Browne ('Phiz'), Dickens found illustrators who represented perfectly in line the characters and scenes he projected in words; so perfectly, indeed, that the novels they illustrated seem incomplete without their pictures, while the later black-and-white artists who drew for Dickens in the Victorian style fail altogether, catching neither the spirit of his work nor always its externals. The reformatory zeal of Hogarth and the fervour of the political caricaturists were turned by Dickens into new channels particular to nineteenth-century industrial England, giving zeal and fervour a deeper potency and wider effect by his abundant infusion of the comic and the pathetic. His sensitiveness to social injustice dated from his own first experience of wage-earning, beginning on his twelfth birthday, though it is not beyond possibility that in adulthood he was inclined to dramatize and give a larger-than-life aspect to the miseries of his boyhood. It has to be remembered, moreover, that if Dickens had had a happy childhood in a comfortable and well-managed home, with parents who provided for him sufficiently and settled him into a profession, he would have been the less likely to develop into the more than life-size novelist, if into a novelist at all.

When Charles was born at Landport, Portsmouth, on 7 February 1812, his father, John Dickens, the younger son of a steward and a housemaid, was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, having married, three years before, Elizabeth Barrow, daughter of a senior official in the same department. The elder Dickens's duties took him and the family to London from 1814 to 1817, then to Chatham until 1822, when they returned to London and settled in Camden Town. Charles remained at school in Chatham for some months longer, and by the time he rejoined his parents he had well explored the district and acquired that love of neighbouring Rochester which led him to purchase the estate at Gad's Hill in 1857 and to wish to be buried nearby.[1]

[1] His wish was not observed: he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Although John Dickens earned a substantial salary he was constantly in debt and on two occasions (1824 and 1834) was committed to the Marshalsea debtors' prison. Charles had been taken from school in the early part of 1823, and spent a year mainly as a domestic drudge at home, relieved by wanderings which took him far from Camden Town and gave him that exceptional intimacy with the byways and back-quarters of London and their odd inhabitants which was to become one of the most striking features of his novels. In the autumn of 1823 Mrs. Dickens made plans for opening in Gower Street a school for the children of parents stationed abroad, but nothing came of it and in the following February Charles was sent to work for a few shillings a week labelling bottles at Warren's Blacking Factory, the place he described in *David Copperfield* (ch. XI) twenty-five years later as 'the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river'; the 'decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old gray rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time. . . .' While the boy was experiencing 'the grief and humiliation of such considerations', his mother and the younger children had joined the father in the relative comfort of the Marshalsea, where Charles also took some of his meals and spent his Sundays, lodging meanwhile first in Camden Town and then at Lant Street, Southwark. His landlady at Camden Town became Mrs. Pipchin in *Dombey and Son*, and the Lant Street house Bob Sawyer's lodgings in *Pickwick Papers*.

A few months after release from the Marshalsea (the debt of £40 having been paid by his brother from money left by their mother) John Dickens was retired from the Navy Pay Office on a small annual allowance. He then took to parliamentary reporting and Charles had two or three years of further schooling in a 'Classical and Commercial Academy' at Hampstead (cf. Salem House in *David Copperfield*), leaving early in 1827 and working in solicitors' offices until, towards the end of the year, he had learned shorthand well enough to become a court reporter at Doctors' Commons (dissolved on the establishment of the Divorce Court and Probate Court in 1857), where he

worked for two years, becoming convinced, as his novels show, that law reform was imperative. His leisure was meanwhile divided between study in the British Museum Reading Room and preparation for the life of an actor, since he intended to take to the stage if circumstances allowed. In March 1832, however, Dickens became a parliamentary reporter on the *True Sun*, transferring in the autumn to the *Mirror of Parliament*, and subsequently to the *Morning Chronicle*.

Everything in the life of the young Dickens served as raw material for the novelist-to-be; though he was richly inventive he was also prudently retentive in memory. His early love, Maria Beadnell, appears in Dora Spenlow (*David Copperfield*), and again, as he saw her years later, in Flora Finching (*Little Dorrit*): the fairy, the sylph, with 'the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways, that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery' had become broad and short of breath; the 'lily had become a peony', and from seeming 'enchanting in all she said and thought' she now seemed 'diffuse and silly': his eyes 'no sooner fell upon the subject of his old passion than it shivered and broke to pieces'. This practice of using personal experience as literary 'copy' has long been a source of complaint and rebuke against novelists, but no creative writer can divorce himself from his own life and the persons in it. If Dickens presented Maria-Dora sentimentally and Maria-Flora cruelly, these and other instances of the kind must be accepted as the less admirable symptoms of the acute sensibility which made him so fully responsive to a myriad aspects of life. In so far as his taste was defective he was a typical child of his age; good taste, moreover, is crippling to a satirist with an urgent passion for social reform.

While still a reporter Dickens began to turn people and happenings into semi-fictional and comicalized sketches, the first six or seven of which were published unpaid in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1833–4. In the latter year he took the pen-name Boz and contributed similar sketches to the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Evening Chronicle*, and (under another pseudonym) to *Bell's Life in London*, a sporting periodical. *Sketches by Boz, Illustrative of Every Day Life and Every Day People* came out in book form in 1836, with illustrations by George Cruikshank, and was immediately successful.

Dickens married Catharine Hogarth in April 1836, in spite of the coldness, sullenness, and obstinacy he complained of in letters to her during their engagement. Her younger sister Mary went to live with them a year later and so endeared herself to Dickens that her sudden death in May 1837 at the age of seventeen left a permanent scar on his memory and accounts for the excess of pathos in the death scenes of young people in his novels. Catharine Dickens bore ten children and was a devoted mother, but not the intelligent and companionable wife that Dickens desired. It is improbable that any woman could conform to the ideal that so imaginative and mentally and emotionally overstrained a man as Dickens would conjure up, and it was no remediable fault in Mrs. Dickens that she was a commonplace woman. The final stage in their long disharmony was reached when Dickens fell in love at the age of forty-five with Ellen Ternan, an eighteen-year-old small-part actress, and the marriage ended with a formal separation in 1858. Rumours 'deeply affecting the moral character of Mr. Dickens' were 'solemnly declared' false in public statements, and the irruption of Ellen Ternan into Dickens's life was unknown to his readers for more than half a century after his death, and its truth was hotly challenged even then by those who cherished the illusion of a blameless Dickens. If there is blame to be allotted, it is his building of a façade of deliberate falsehood that injures Dickens's reputation more than it could suffer from association with the young actress.[1]

In 1836, neither for the first time nor the last, fashion stepped into literature as midwife to a newborn great reputation. While it is certain that nothing could have kept Dickens from developing into a novelist of genius, his plunge into fame with *Pickwick Papers* was not of his own choosing. The writings of Robert Smith Surtees (1803–64) stimulated the popular taste for illustrated sporting novels from the time that he started the *New Sporting Magazine* in 1831, editing it until 1836 and bringing

[1] The Ternan affair was first made public by Thomas Wright in a newspaper article in April 1934 and followed by his *Life of Charles Dickens* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1935). See also the more personal *Dickens and Daughter* by Gladys Storey (Muller, London, 1939) based on information from Kate Dickens. Later biographies of Dickens take up the story either as a fact to be fitted in or as a slander to be refuted.

into its pages the fictional Mr. John Jorrocks, 'a sporting grocer, the quintessence of Cockney vulgarity, good humour, absurdity, and cunning'. Surtees had begun (following his failure as a solicitor) with *The Horseman's Manual, being a Treatise on Soundness, the Law of Warranty, and generally on the Laws relating to Horses* (1830), the only book to which he attached his name. He succeeded to his father's estate in Durham in 1838 and became High Sheriff of the county in 1856. His best works —*Handley Cross, or the Spa Hunt: a Sporting Tale* (1843; enlarged, with illustrations by John Leech, 1854), *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* (1853), *Ask Mamma* (1858)—veer from the robust to the raffish, and their humour does not balk at either the coarse or the coy. They are at the head of their kind, and though a liking for the kind may no longer be widespread, Surtees still arouses a limited enthusiasm by his fundamental healthiness and love of out-of-doors activities, mainly 'the noble sport of hunting'. There is little construction in his books: they amble, or trot, or canter, or gallop, in a proper spirit of horsemanship. Their merit is all in the going, the point of arrival matters little. Indeed, Surtees wrote in a prefatory paragraph to the 1854 edition of *Handley Cross*: 'the work merely professes to be a tale and does not aspire to the dignity of a novel'.

Two days before Dickens's marriage the first monthly part of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* came out. Sporting novels with plates by popular artists having caught the fancy of the public, Chapman & Hall invited Dickens to provide written material for a series of illustrations by Robert Seymour, to deal with the exploits of a club of Cockney sportsmen. He induced the publishers to modify their plan, since his knowledge of sport was small. Though he produced a masterpiece of the first order, the work stirred no immediate enthusiasm and the sales were discouraging until the fifth number in August 1836 brought in Sam Weller. By the fifteenth number the circulation of *Pickwick Papers* had soared to 40,000 copies, and Dickens for the rest of his life experienced a more widespread popular fame than any other novelist has known. Seymour committed suicide after dissatisfaction had been expressed with one of his illustrations for chapter III; and when Robert Buss had failed to please, the right man was found in young Hablot Knight Browne,

(1815–82) who, as 'Phiz', became Dickens's illustrator for several novels.

It is pointless to call Dickens the greatest English novelist, pointless and without foundation, for he could as arguably be called the worst of novelists. His plots are mostly jerry-built, he had little sense of construction, and as a prose stylist he was often mediocre and sometimes worse. There is a paradox in all this, for if Dickens had been a better writer his novels would almost certainly have lacked the qualities that make them living books. He was the greatest of literary improvisators, and the publishing practices of his time were suited to—and even necessitated—improvisation. Except for a writer such as Trollope, who kept a reserve stock of unpublished novels in his desk, publication in monthly (or more frequent) parts encouraged a novelist to pace only one step ahead of the printer, writing episodically and making his book an aggregation rather than a construction. If readers disapproved, as they occasionally did even of Dickens, the author could modify his intentions or change direction.

When Dickens's work as a whole is considered with inappropriate judicial calm—inappropriate since he is preponderantly for enthusiasts—his faults or limitations or shortcomings demand only elementary powers of detection. His sympathetic characters are too often mawkish, his comic characters travestied, his pathos overstrained, his deep humanity and desire for reform governed more by philanthropy and sentiment than by reason and a true sense of social justice and equality. In brief, the Dickens world is his own. However much it draws from personal experience and from the life of his time, it is not a reflection of actuality but a new creation. In boyhood he read Smollett, Fielding, Goldsmith, Defoe, *Don Quixote*, the *Arabian Nights*, and dramatized the characters in himself. Though diverted by literary success from becoming an actor, he never lost his attachment to the stage. He took part in amateur theatricals and during the years from 1858 his histrionic talent was vented at length in the public readings which hastened his death by the energy they drained from him. All his novels are a stage and his men and women players. He did not, in the way that Thackeray and Trollope (and Jane Austen) did, 'live with' his characters: he set them in motion and passed on to

others. It is all a gloriously pulsating, entertaining, moving, horrifying pageant. The figures in the foreground tread the stage so compellingly that too little attention is claimed by the setting. But when we look past the characters to the descriptive passages, Dickens's mastery of visual detail provides a further source of enjoyment.

Stirrings of the social conscience appear in *Pickwick*, notably in the chapters located in the Fleet Prison. In the second novel *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (1837–8),[1] Dickens began the series of assaults on social abuses which was to be aimed at the brutalities of officialdom, bogus education, the law courts, government departments, the debtors' prisons, conditions of childbirth, and much more that stirred his indignation and disgust. But in the treatment of these subjects he kept realism within the bounds of what his readers would stomach without taking offence: the scoundrelism of Fagin and Bill Sykes is sauced with grim melodrama; the sordid impecuniosity of Micawber (the shadow of his own father) is made palatable by farcical comedy, as are a score of otherwise wholly detestable characters. We glimpse through Mrs. Gamp the beastliness of her sort, but in herself she is enormously entertaining. There was, we may believe, subtlety as well as prudence in Dickens's methods. He caught the attention of his generation to the things he cared about by attracting them to the (often spurious) humours of the given situation: if the pill was gilded it was at least swallowed, whereas the 'realism' of later writers repelled the squeamish and encouraged an outraged stubborn inattention.

Thackeray

Like Rudyard Kipling, more than half a century later, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63) was born in India, and also like Kipling he spent some unhappy childhood years in England. His father died when the boy was four, and from six

[1] The chronology of Dickens's other principal novels is: *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9), *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* (1840–1), *Christmas Books* (1843–8; collected 1852), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4), *Dombey and Son* (1846–8), *David Copperfield* (1849–50), *Bleak House* (1852–3), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855–7), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860–1), *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (unfinished, 1870).

to ten in the school at Walpole House, Chiswick (the original for the academy on Chiswick Mall in *Vanity Fair*) he sought relief from loneliness and bullying by excessive concentration on memories of his mother, who rejoined him in 1821 after her second marriage (to Henry Carmichael-Smyth). Thackeray went from his first school to Charterhouse and then to Trinity College, Cambridge, leaving in 1830 without a degree. After travelling in Germany and Italy he started on a legal career but abandoned it within two years, and in 1833 bought, edited, wrote, and drew for the *National Standard*, a weekly paper which soon expired. He then studied art in Paris and undertook journalism there. He married in 1836 and returned to England in the next year, when he began to contribute to *Fraser's Magazine* the imaginary correspondence of an uneducated footman, Charles James Yellowplush, detailing his observations on the social scene. Thackeray's wife became permanently insane in 1840.

Among the variety of works he published in the ten years from 1837, the most important are *Catherine* (1839–40), *A Shabby Genteel Story* (1840), *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840), *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* (1841), *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844), and *The Book of Snobs* (in *Punch* 1846–7; in volume form 1848). Thackeray's intense reaction to snobbery has created a strong impression that he was himself over-conscious of the attractions of social rank and was extruding from his system a troublesome secretion. A great deal of his writing has an irritant effect which severely limits the number of his readers, and there is little before *Vanity Fair* (1847–8) that survives in full vigour. Trollope said in his *Autobiography* that Thackeray's 'knowledge of human nature was supreme' and that his characters have 'a force and a truth which has not . . . been within the reach of any other English novelist in any period',[1] but he limits his further comments to *Barry Lyndon*, *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, and *Esmond*.[2] Charlotte Brontë dedicated the second edition of *Jane Eyre* in 1847 to Thackeray as 'the satirist of *Vanity Fair*' in whom she saw 'an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognized; . . . the first social regenerator

[1] *Autobiography*, ch. XIII.

[2] Trollope wrote a fuller account in his volume on Thackeray in the English Men of Letters series (Macmillan, London, 1879).

of the day. . . . His wit is bright, his humour attractive', but it was his 'serious genius' that impressed her most. Sub-titled 'A Novel without a Hero', *Vanity Fair* is a novel with a usurping heroine, for the unscrupulous low-born Becky Sharp plays all

Illustration from *The Rose and the Ring*

the other characters off the boards. 'The famous little Becky Puppet', wrote Thackeray in his archest tones, 'has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible in the joints, and lively on the wire.'[1] What he did not add was that she comes to life so

[1] Preface to *Vanity Fair* in book form (1848).

vigorously as to be an independent human being among the puppets. The raffish characters, indeed, are salt and spice to the book, and it was an ironical trick of fate that this should be so, for he wrote to his mother that 'all the people in the book with the exception of Dobbin are odious', and that he wanted to enforce his moral by making 'a set of people living without God in the world'. To many of the book's later readers Dobbin has seemed as a literary creation worse than odious; he has been found insipid. But whatever judgment may be reached concerning the characters in *Vanity Fair*, there has been no regardable difference of opinion in respect of the Waterloo chapters, and, most famous of all, the last paragraph of chapter XXXIII: 'No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.'

Even if it is not the most exciting and likable—a claim that can be made for Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861)—Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond, Esquire, A Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne* (1852) is surely the most perfect historical novel in the English language. Thackeray, one feels, was always homesick for the eighteenth century, and by returning to its early part in this book he seemed to find his proper place and period. There are displeasing factors in the story, but the atmosphere is so convincing, the portrayal of Steele and Addison and Swift and Marlborough so brilliant yet solid, that the plot becomes of secondary account. By presenting it as written by Esmond himself, Thackeray gave his book the final touch of simulated first-hand authenticity. How excellently, for example, are the contrasting temperaments of the ebullient Richard Steele and the reserved Joseph Addison caught here:

> [Steele] and his friend were making their way down Germain Street, and Dick all of a sudden left his companion's arm, and ran after a gentleman who was poring over a folio volume at the book-shop near to St. James's Church. He was a fair, tall man, in a snuff-coloured suit, with a plain sword, very sober, and almost shabby in appearance—at least when compared to Captain Steele, who loved to adorn his jolly round person with the finest of clothes, and shone in scarlet and gold lace. The Captain rushed up, then,

IV. *Philip in Church* by Frederick Walker, from Thackeray's *The Adventures of Philip*

to the student of the book-stall, took him in his arms, hugged him, and would have kissed him—for Dick was always hugging and kissing his friends—but the other stepped back with a flush on his pale face, seeming to decline this public manifestation of Steele's regard.

A sequel to *Esmond*, *The Virginians* was published serially in 1857–9; and *Pendennis* (1848–50) was followed by *The Newcomes* (1853–5). There is a remarkable cross-linking between Thackeray's novels, through the reappearance of characters, sometimes almost casually introduced, or of their descendants.[1] He became the first editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860, and contributed to it his remaining novels of note, *Lovel the Widower* (1860) and *The Adventures of Philip* (1861–2).

Trollope and Others

Little more than a biographical summary need be added to what has been said above of Anthony Trollope (1815–82). His father, a barrister in a steadily failing practice, felt himself injured by fate and revenged himself by nagging his children. When Anthony was twelve his mother went to America in the hope of making money for the family, failed in a bazaar she opened in Cincinnati, but launched into a reasonably successful career with *The Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), published after her return to England. She followed it with novels and travel books which, said Trollope, 'surrounded us again with moderate comforts'. He was educated at Harrow and Winchester, went into the service of the General Post Office in 1834, and out of his early experiences there wrote *The Three Clerks* (1858). He rose to the office of Surveyor and remained in the service for thirty-three years, until he resigned in 1867 on being passed over for the Under-Secretaryship. He had ridden far and wide into the remotest corners of the United Kingdom establishing new post offices, and in addition to this valuable official work he found time for regular hunting, for a good deal of conversation at the Garrick Club, and for writing (up to the end of 1867) twenty-three books, mostly novels of considerable length. In the fifteen years after his retirement he published a further twenty or more.

[1] For a study of this device, see *Thackeray the Novelist* by Geoffrey Tillotson (Cambridge University Press, 1954).

While Trollope's miscellaneous novels have excellences of their own, his restored fame rests steadily upon the two series: the Barsetshire novels—*The Warden* (1855), *Barchester Towers* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1858), *Framley Parsonage* (1861), *The Small House at Allington*[1] (1864), *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867); and the 'political' novels—*Can you Forgive Her?* (1864), *Phineas Finn: The Irish Member* (1869), *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873), *Phineas Redux* (1874), *The Prime Minister* (1876), *The Duke's Children* (1880).

Whether Barchester is Salisbury or Winchester or neither or both is insignificant beside the achievement which Trollope rightly claimed that Barsetshire is 'a little bit of England which I have myself created', and it is at least as real as Hardy's Wessex. His characters walk the earth; they have no wild passions, no extraordinary vices or improbable virtues. None towers above the others, though most readers are agreed in singling out Mrs. Proudie in the first series and Lady Glencora in the other. Trollope trod surely along a middle line, free alike from the superior merits and the disturbing faults of his more spectacular contemporaries.

The chapter (XIII) 'On English Novelists of the Present Day' in Trollope's *Autobiography* names—besides Thackeray, George Eliot, Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë—Lord Lytton, Charles Lever, Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Anne Thackeray (Thackeray's daughter), Rhoda Broughton, and Disraeli. Of these, Wilkie Collins (1824–89) has received most attention in the present century as a pioneer of the detective novel in *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868). Attempts to restore Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81) to the ranks of the noteworthy English novelists have been made nugatory by the public inability to accept a great statesman as a mere novelist, but his *Sybil; or, The Two Nations* (1845) is one of the major novels of reform of that decade, while *Coningsby* (1844) and *Tancred* (1847) stand high among political novels. Charles Reade (1814–84), whose historical novel *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861) has already been named, was a natural storyteller ruined by an undisciplined passion for documentation

[1] *The Small House at Allington* is not strictly in the Barsetshire series, but it links the two groups.

Illustration from *Framley Parsonage*

and a tendency to borrow too freely. Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton (1803–73), a prolific and long popular historical novelist with *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), *The Last of the Barons* (1843), and *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings* (1848), also wrote political, Utopian, and occult novels, besides successful plays.[1] But little if any of his voluminous work has permanent qualities. Charles Lever (1806–72) wrote Irish novels in a now outmoded style, e.g. *Harry Lorrequer* (1847) and *Charles O'Malley* (1840), but a later work *A Day's Ride* (1863) had some formative influence on Bernard Shaw.[2] Anne Thackeray (Lady Ritchie) (1837–1919) and Rhoda Broughton (1840–1920) have ceased to be of serious account.

Of the contemporary novelists unmentioned by Trollope, Charles Kingsley (1819–75) is remembered by boys for *Westward Ho!* (1855), by younger children for *The Heroes* (1856) and *The Water Babies* (1863), while *Alton Locke* (1850), *Yeast* (1851), and *Two Years Ago* (1857) have a place among novels of reform. His brother Henry Kingsley (1830–76) emigrated to Australia, producing in *Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859) a full-blooded bushranging novel, and in *Ravenshoe* (1861) a story of disinheritance and priestly duplicity. Captain (Frederick) Marryat (1792–1848) wrote voluminously from 1830 to the time of his death, using his earlier naval experiences effectively in a succession of novels of seafaring life which were the best in that kind until Joseph Conrad surpassed them. But whereas Conrad was superior by far in style and seriousness of approach, he had none of Marryat's rich fund of humour, nor of his abundant resource as a storyteller. *Peter Simple* (1834) and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836) survive by merit, and when Marryat turned to writing for young people he produced two children's classics, *Masterman Ready* (1841) and *The Children of the New Forest* (1847).

[1] See below, pp. 246–7.
[2] See the Preface to Shaw's *Major Barbara*.

CHAPTER XV

TENNYSON AND THE BROWNINGS

Prosperity and religion sat heavily upon the middle classes in Victorian England. In no previous age had there been an equivalent pervasion of wealth and piety, nor yet so discomfiting a measure of brooding upon the soul and its prospect of immortality. In retrospect it appears a fortunate age, but also a far from happy one. Among the makers of its literature only Browning and Trollope seem to have found, in their different ways, a true contentment of the mind and heart. The greatest work of Tennyson—who, with whatever warrant, has been installed as the 'typical' Victorian—was a mortuary poem; and though his poetry is as rich in external beauty as any, it is grey in its views of immediately contemporary things, and if greatly concerned with immortality greatly concerned also with death. 'The still, sad music of humanity' which at times chastened and subdued Wordsworth held Tennyson in thrall, the more so since he had little of the masculine strength of intellect that fortified Wordsworth. Browning's full possession of intellectual strength gives his poetry the invigorating tone which contrasts robustly with the enervation of much that Tennyson wrote. Whereas for Tennyson life was a dim prelude to the promise of Immortality, for Browning immortality was the postlude and fulfilment of Life. While both were among the great poetic artists, Tennyson's was an art of surface and sound, Browning's an art of substance and sense, founded on a deeper knowledge and comprehension of the sister arts of music and painting than Tennyson possessed or, indeed, would have cared to possess. In the dissimilar soil from which they grew lay the seeds of contrast which were to make them the opposing yet complementary figures of their period.

Tennyson

Though the Rev. George Tennyson fathered three poets, it is unlikely that the work of the elder two, Frederick and Charles, would have made more than a temporary impression even if

they had not been overshadowed by their brother. Alfred Tennyson (1809–92) was born in the rectory at Somersby, Lincolnshire, and went from his father's teaching and Louth Grammar School to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he won the Chancellor's Medal in 1829 with a poem on the set subject, *Timbuctoo*. With Charles he had already published (1827) *Poems by Two Brothers*, and in 1830 came his *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* which, in spite of the disfavour of the still powerful Scottish critics, sounded some preliminary notes of what was to be the characteristic Tennysonian music. He travelled on the Continent in 1832 with Arthur Henry Hallam, his friend at Cambridge, whose death in the next year became the starting-point of the long-gestated elegy *In Memoriam*.

Poems (1832; dated 1833) made little more immediate impression than the 1830 volume, though it included 'The Lady of Shalott', 'The Lotos-Eaters' and other pieces which in their final form[1] were to become established as major works. In what may be called his *pure poetry*—that in which his own opinions and convictions are not deeply engaged—Tennyson's vision and melody come to us often through a trance-like veil, softened in outline and muted in sound. Even when the picturing is clear and exact there is no hardness of outline, no sharp aural impact. Tennyson's eye was always the servant of his ear, though not in any faulty degree. As a nature poet he had, as it were, an excellent sense of draughtsmanship, and he fell short of the greatest in this kind only in the respect that he was not clothed or possessed by Nature as Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley were; or even as in a lesser measure Coleridge, his early master, was. Essentially, nothing could be clearer in outline than (in 'The Lady of Shalott') the 'long fields of barley and of rye', the reapers 'in among the bearded barley', 'the red cloaks of market girls', yet everything in the poem is magically changed by the potently lulling metrical music:

> In the stormy east-wind straining,
> The pale yellow woods were waning,
> The broad stream in his banks complaining,
> Heavily the low sky raining

[1] Tennyson subjected his poems to substantial revision, sometimes in response to the comments of reviewers, but chiefly to satisfy his own changing standards.

Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

The music is enrapturing but also enervating. It drifts us to the never-never land where Tennyson found compensation for disturbing features of Victorian England. As a romantic poet he is linked to Keats, but there is a fundamental disparity. Tennyson's romantic poetry acts as an anodyne; Keats's, in maturity, as a tonic: a picturesque ideality engulfs Tennyson; Keats kept a firm hold on actuality and still 'pecked about the gravel' even in his most romantic excursions. Tennyson is to Keats somewhat as Rossini is to Mozart. Nevertheless, Tennyson readily induces a willing suspension of mental austerity when his own system of verbal magic is in full operation, as it is throughout 'The Lotos-Eaters' and more especially in the opening stanza of the Choric Song which forms its second part:

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And through the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

The publication of a two-volume collection of *Poems* is 1842 gave Tennyson his first taste of the popularity he was to enjoy increasingly throughout the remaining half-century of his life. But he had not yet found prosperity and his immediate needs were relieved by the grant of a Civil List pension of £200 a year in 1845, when he was thirty-six. On the death of Wordsworth in 1850 he accepted the Poet Laureateship after the octogenarian Samuel Rogers had declined it, and he was given a peerage in 1884, the first and only poet to be so honoured.

The Princess: A Medley (1847) is saved from the destructive Victorian sentimentality of its story, its 'babies roll'd about like

tumbled fruit on grass', its 'sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair' and all the rest of its fanciful romanticized trappings, by the interspersed lyrics; while *Maud: A Monodrama* (1855) is similarly lifted above its melodramatic tendency and its concluding glorification of war. Between these two works had come the elegy to Hallam, *In Memoriam* (1850), worked on by Tennyson intermittently for seventeen years. It has neither the classical dignity and force of Milton's *Lycidas* nor the spontaneity and passionate exaltation of *Adonais*, which Shelley wrote within the year of Keats's death. *In Memoriam* is not, moreover, a unity, but a series of poems—reflections, meditations, broodings—on life and death. It is as much an egotistical spiritual autobiography as a lament for Hallam. Indeed, a single sorrow could hardly be maintained so long, and since the structure of *In Memoriam* bears little relation to that of the classical elegy it would be inappropriate to judge it by the formal requirements which in that class of poetics traditionally override the expression of personal emotion. But when the reader's mind turns away from any obscuring awareness of deliberation in the work as a whole, many of the separate sections have the moving dignity which animates man's seeking spirit, however much in Victorian times the seeker might incline towards spiritual self-love. At our distance from its personal occasion and metaphysical purpose, the poetry of *In Memoriam* is more pleasing than its philosophy is impressive, and its simplicities more memorable than its occasionally dubious profundities:

> Calm is the morn without a sound,
> Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
> And only thro' the faded leaf
> The chestnut pattering to the ground:
>
> Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
> And on these dews that drench the furze,
> And all the silvery gossamers
> That twinkle into green and gold: . . . (XI)

Tennyson's interest had been caught early by the Arthurian stories and he experimented variously with the material before undertaking a fuller treatment in the series of *Idylls of the King* (1859–85). These attempts to naturalize the Arthurian heroes and their women in the England of Victoria, and always with

an approving eye on the blameless home-life of the Queen, were doomed by the basic incongruity of the enterprise, whatever incidental poetic merits they may have.

If a sign is needed of what Tennyson might have written in a bolder age, his 'Ulysses' (in the 1842 collection) gives that sign. Furthermore, if all else that he wrote were lost and wiped from memory, it would be accepted as beyond question that 'Ulysses' with its magnificent, stoical, defiant close could have been written by none but a poet of the first rank:

> . . . Come, my friends,
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
> Push off, and sitting well in order, smite
> The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the paths
> Of all the western stars, until I die.
> It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
> It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
> And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
> Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

The Brownings

A country rectory produced Tennyson. Robert Browning (1812–89) came from the residence of a Bank of England official living in Camberwell, on the outskirts of London. His mother was of Scottish-German ancestry, her father a shipowner at Dundee. The elder Browning was in a minor way both a poet and a graphic artist, and from him Robert inherited devotion to reading, music, and painting, all of which sank deeply into the poetry he was to write. He came first under the spell of Ossian and then of Byron, both of whom he imitated in unpublished juvenilia. These influences were soon to be overborne by that of Shelley, whose *Queen Mab* persuaded Browning for a time into atheism and vegetarianism. He was educated for the most part privately, studied music, went to lectures at Guy's Hospital, and showed a predilection for physical exercise.

In his first published work, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833), he was 'exploring passion and mind for the first time', and though the poem has stretches of incoherence and extravagance, it is a remarkably sustained performance for so young a man. Beyond its Shelleyan echoes there are fore-soundings of the mature Browning's voice. Embryonically, Pauline is cast in the dramatic monologue form which was to be developed into Browning's distinctive personal contribution to English poetry, while in the exploration of passion and mind it preluded the main substance of his total work. *Paracelsus* (1835), based on the life of the sixteenth-century Swiss alchemist, is cast in dialogue form; *Strafford* (1837) was produced with small success by Macready at Covent Garden with Helen Faucit as Lady Carlisle; *Sordello* (1840), set in thirteenth-century Italy, is as difficult as it is long; and it was not until he published *Pippa Passes* (1841) as the first of a series of unrelated works collectively entitled *Bells and Pomegranates* that he brought his genius within the bounds of average comprehension, though still without any encouraging acceptance. Pippa, a girl from the silk-mills of Asolo, holidaying on New Year's day, changes, unknown to herself, the lives of four people who hear her singing as she passes by. Those critics who have charged Browning with propagating a false optimism offer one of Pippa's songs as evidence-in-chief:

> The year's at the spring,
> The day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven;
> The hill-side's dew-pearled:
> The lark's on the wing;
> The snail's on the thorn;
> God's in his heaven—
> All's right with the world!

It can, of course, be argued in defence that the sentiments are accommodated to the mood of a happy young girl and are therefore dramatically and psychologically right; but it could not be claimed with equal confidence that Browning dissented in principle from Pippa, though he might have made numerous provisos. A sounder line of defence would be that even if Browning himself took an over-optimistic view of the universe—

for the universe rather than the world was the ultimate point of his vision—it is more profitable to the soul of man to think too well than too meanly. There are villains enough, hypocrites enough, base fellows enough in Browning's poetry: he was not apt to overlook their existence or their ill-doing; but unless he was ready to write off the universe as an idiot's creation he could not believe that the villains and hypocrites and base fellows were more than a temporary aberration of mankind. If God *is* in his heaven, as Browning did not doubt, in the ultimate sense all *is* right with the world: the silk-girl has grasped the root of things and found the Truth that lies in all faith and beyond all doubt.

Bells and Pomegranates comprised eight volumes, completed in 1846. The plays—*King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1843), a *Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (1843), and *Colombe's Birthday* (1844)—ended his career as an unsuccessful dramatist; but *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845) set him on the high road to fame, though popularity was still far away. These two volumes included the invigorating Cavalier Tunes, and such 'uncharacteristic' pieces as 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin', 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix', 'Home Thoughts from Abroad', and more which might have been written by some other poet than Browning. He struck out on his own distinctive line, however, in such poems as 'The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church' and the first and shorter version of 'Saul', which derived distantly from Christopher Smart's 'Song to David'[1] and was amplified in the next and fully characteristic volume of Browning's shorter poems, *Men and Women* (1855), which came out when he had been for some nine years an idyllically happy husband.

Elizabeth Barrett (1806–61) married Robert Browning in 1846. She was the eldest child of eleven born to Edward Moulton Barrett, owner of plantations in the West Indies. The family moved from Durham to Herefordshire while she was a child, and some time later to the house in Wimpole Street, London, where Browning first encountered her lying on a sofa as a chronic invalid, the role assigned to her by her father when she injured her spine years before. Elizabeth Barrett had

[1] See Ward: II, pp. 219–20.

published several books of poems before Browning visited her in May 1845, and there was already between them a bond of reciprocal admiration which soon deepened into passionate and devoted love. Edward Barrett has been depicted in dark colours as a jealously, even guiltily, possessive father who forbade marriage for his daughters. This enchaining relationship and her own assurance of physical disability led Elizabeth to refuse Browning's first proposal of marriage, but his persistence and forceful personality at length persuaded her to leave Wimpole Street in secret and they were married at the nearby St. Mary-le-bone Church in September 1846, leaving immediately for Italy and living for the most part in Florence until her death after fifteen years of renewed life.

In her generation and for a considerable time afterwards, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was ranked as the greatest of English women poets. Her faults have since become more obvious than her merits, and except for the love sonnets which she is said to have thrust complete into her husband's pocket one morning after writing them unknown to him, she would now be almost wholly unread. With little care for the technical discipline of verse, she was ardent in humanitarian feeling and political enthusiasm but lacking in intellectual judgment, and was incapable of economy of expression except when this was imposed upon her by a restricted verse-form as in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), the title used for the love poems when they were given to the public. In these the intensity of personally experienced and canalized emotion keeps her habitual diffuseness in check, and though the degree of esteem accorded them must vary with periodical changes in critical and public taste they have an assured place in English poetry. Her one-time immensely popular and immensely long *Aurora Leigh* (1856), a novel in blank verse and also a compendium of the author's manifold opinions, has lost its appeal, as has the mass of her poetry, though 'The Cry of the Children' (1843) retains its documentary interest as a contribution to the large output of 'social-conscience' literature which marked the 1840s.

Robert Browning bore with admirable fortitude and loving goodwill the popularity of his wife's poems while his own continued in neglect. He published two closet dramas, *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy* (both 1846), and two poems in one volume on

religious themes, *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (1850) before with *Men and Women* he demonstrated beyond further question that his most expressive medium was the dramatic monologue. Through the mouth of a single speaker in each of his many poems in that form Browning presented a series of protracted discussions on an extraordinary range of subjects, the case put forward by the unheard speaker being either substantially set out in repetition by the principal or made clear by deduction. Browning's capacious and subtle mind delighted in the doublings and redoublings of casuistical argument, and with remarkable agility and dexterity he insinuated himself into the minds of his created characters, however foreign to his own convictions their pleadings might be.

He was an anti-Victorian or at the most a non-Victorian in his belief that a thing resolved or desired yet left undone was a sin of inaction, even though the action fulfilled might itself be sinful. In 'The Statue and the Bust' the unhappily married wife and her lover grow old and unfulfilled:

> So weeks grew months, years; gleam by gleam
> The glory dropped from their youth and love,
> And both perceived they had dreamed a dream . . .

The poem ends:

> Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be what it will!
>
> The counter our lovers staked was lost
> As surely as if it were lawful coin:
> And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
>
> Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
> Though the end in sight was a crime, I say.
> You of the virtue (we issue join)
> How strive you? . . .

Through a preponderating weight of evidence it is possible to find among the profusely conflicting views stated by Browning's characters a coherent philosophy of life which eludes brief summarization. He was not an advocate of rejection or of that form of inverted spiritual pride which finds its satisfaction in

mortifying the flesh. Fra Lippo Lippo in the monologue bearing his name is made to say:

> I always see the Garden and God there
> A-making man's wife—and, my lesson learned,
> The value and significance of flesh,
> I can't unlearn ten minutes afterward.

Yet Browning was no sensualist. Body and soul were for him the unity which is our here-and-now Life:

> Let us not always say
> 'Spite of this flesh to-day
> 'I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!'
> As the bird wings and sings,
> Let us cry 'All good things
> 'Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!'[1]

Browning's greatest work, perhaps also the greatest work in English nineteenth-century literature, *The Ring and the Book* (1868), brings the dramatic monologue to its height. Based upon a seventeenth-century Roman murder trial recorded in an 'old yellow book' which Browning bought from a stall in Florence in 1860, it surveys the case from ten or more aspects, telling the story again and again in the words of the several principals concerned, as well as from the view-points of the lawyers, the Roman public, and the Pope as judge. Casuistry, nobility, foulness, purity, prejudice, stupidity—each has its voice. From the amalgam of truth and falsehood which constituted the original case, Browning endeavours by repetition and varied revelation of character to refine away the dross of description as the goldsmith refines away the base metal and fashions the precious and perfect ring. The poem is dramatic, mentally and spiritually satisfying, beautiful, terrifying, tender, absorbing—and at times so exacting as to seem to superficial readers dull and wearisome, though of all the long poems in English it probably has the fewest boring patches. It was a daring achievement brought to success, but not tried again by any poet, though Joseph Conrad employed in his novels a similar truth-finding technique of round-the-circle repetition through the dramatic prose monologues of his recurrent character Marlow.[2]

[1] 'Rabbi Ben Ezra', xii (*Dramatis Personæ*, 1864).
[2] See below, p. 279.

F. T. Palgrave
from R Browning.

THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

BY

ROBERT BROWNING,
M.A.,
HONORARY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON.
1868.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE ARNOLD GENERATION

If Victorian humour had been more personal and self-critical than external and institutional, the Victorians would have suffered fewer personal crises and their writings would have been relieved of much that is heavily ponderous. Those who lost their faith as well as those who consciously preserved their humility before God were disproportionately preoccupied with the soul, its demands and perils and maladies, and too little aware that as physical good health brings forgetfulness of the body so spiritual good health banishes uneasy probing of the soul. A good deal of Victorian religion was little better than spiritual hypochondria. Whereas the Elizabethan Muse enjoined Sir Philip Sidney 'Look in thy heart and write', the Victorian Muse was more often disposed to command 'Look in thy soul and write'. A broodingly solemn view of the universe is no more to be applauded than a flippant one. When Margaret Fuller declared 'I accept the universe', Carlyle responded: 'By God, she'd better!' But few Victorians accepted the universe as a going concern. In their passion for reform they went beyond—when they did not by-pass—social problems and sought not so much to assist the purposes of God as to presume to improve upon them according to their lights, dim though the lights might be. The Fall of Man was their theme, contemplated with a gloomy show of humility which discouraged them from smiling at themselves or perceiving their own absurdity in the sight of God, to whom they failed to attribute that capacity for divine laughter which alone can make mankind tolerable to the Creator.

More than by any other single person the foundations of mid-Victorian earnest solemnity were prepared by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Arnold (1795–1842) during his fourteen years as headmaster of Rugby from 1828. Before he ventured upon ordination as a minister of the Church in 1818 he had passed through a crisis of religious doubt but, that surmounted, he became compensatingly imbued with a proselytizing Christian passion that found its most fruitful exercise at Rugby. His aim there was to

develop a type of education in which moral as well as intellectual faculties should be amply engaged, to the end that the youths should leave school adequately equipped for the role of Christian gentlemen in English society. As an educationist Thomas Arnold's services in principle and by practice were inestimable. He energized the whole public school system by introducing modern studies (languages, history, and science) to leaven the traditional concentration on classical learning, and although in retrospect his type of moral teaching may seem to have encouraged a morbid habit of priggish introspection it nevertheless created an atmosphere in which brutalities and vices lingering from preceding generations could not longer survive. The work that he conducted within the orbit of the privileged classes his elder son was to extend into a larger sphere.

Matthew Arnold and Others

In the preface to *The Battle of the Books* Swift wrote: 'Instead of dirt and poison we have rather chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax; thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light'. From this source came the key phrase adopted by Matthew Arnold to denote the aim of his own lifework. He wrote in the preface to *Culture and Anarchy* (1869): 'The pursuit of perfection . . . is the pursuit of sweetness and light. . . . He who works for sweetness and light united, works to make reason and the will of God prevail.' Light he did shed, but sweetness in the common sense has no prominent place in his writings. He was at loggerheads with the larger part of his generation, which he saw as composed of 'Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace', his deepest contempt and most frequent complaint being directed to the Philistine, defined by him as 'a strong, dogged unenlightened opponent of the chosen people, of the children of light'. A dour note threads through much of his prose and verse, and his mood is not seldom distempered into intellectual and moral arrogance. Nevertheless, as one of Her Majesty the Queen's Inspectors of Schools he brought about numerous fruitful changes in national education.

Matthew Arnold (1822–88), born at Laleham in Middlesex, was educated at Rugby and Winchester before going to Balliol College, Oxford, where in 1843 he won the Newdigate Prize

with *Cromwell*, a less remarkable poem than his *Alaric at Rome*, recited at Rugby three years earlier when he was only eighteen. After leaving Oxford he taught classics for a brief time at his father's school, and then from 1847 to 1851 served as private secretary to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Lord President of the Council, who in the latter year made Arnold an inspector of schools. From 1857 to 1867 he held the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford, and in 1883 received a Civil List pension of £250 a year.

Apart from the Rugby and Oxford pieces, the first volume bearing his name was *Poems* (1853), containing, as the preface denoted, many poems already published as by 'A.' in *The Strayed Reveller* (1849) and *Empedocles on Etna* (1852). Arnold did not reprint *Empedocles* in its entirety until 1867, explaining in the preface to the 1853 volume that he had come to consider the poem 'poetically faulty' since from the situation of Empedocles, 'one of the last of the Greek religious philosophers', 'no poetical enjoyment can be derived'. It was a situation, he held, 'in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental stress is prolonged . . . in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid . . . the representation of them in poetry is painful. . . .' The main purpose of the preface was to support the view that 'the eternal objects of Poetry . . . are actions; human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves' and that the poet does best to deal with the great stories of the past, 'to delight himself with the contemplation of some noble action of a heroic time, and to enable others, through his representation of it, to delight in it also'. To that end Matthew Arnold wrote *Tristram and Iseult* (1852), *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853), *Balder Dead* (1855), which go some way towards refuting his theory, since, like most narrative verse dealing with actions of an age which is not the poet's own, they lack the urgency and immediacy which creates delight and inspires to rewarding contemplation. In the edition of 1854 Arnold admitted that he had in the previous year's preface left 'many things incompletely stated' and had omitted to touch on 'the question, how far, and in what manner, the opinions there expressed respecting the choice of subjects apply to lyric poetry'. It may, indeed, seem perverse that he should have put up so

strong a case for objective poetry and excluded 'Empedocles', whose hero represented that stage of Greek thought in which 'the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced', for Arnold's mind was in its true element when communing with itself or meditating its own responses to experience:

> The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
> And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
> A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
> And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
> The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.[1]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nor bring, to see me cease to live,
> Some doctor full of phrase and fame,
> To shake his sapient head, and give
> The ill he cannot cure a name.
>
> Nor fetch, to take the accustom'd toll
> Of the poor sinner bound for death,
> His brother-doctor of the soul,
> To canvass with official breath
>
> The future and its viewless things—
> That undiscover'd mystery
> Which one who feels death's winnowing wings
> Must needs read clearer, sure, than he![2]

Notwithstanding his theoretical and academic attachment to the past, Arnold's mental and emotional pulses were genuinely stirred only by things of the present and contingencies of the future. Thus it is that the two poems by which he has been best remembered are charged with personal emotion: 'The Scholar-Gipsy' (1853) and 'Thyrsis' (1866) both inspired by his moving and enduring memories of Oxford and its surrounding country, intensified in 'Thyrsis' by affection for his dead friend Arthur Hugh Clough.

> Screen'd is this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,
> And here till sun-down, Shepherd, will I be.
> Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,
> And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
> Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;
> And air-swept lindens yield

[1] 'The Buried Life' (1852). [2] 'A Wish' (1867).

Their scent, and rustle down their perfum'd showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with shade;
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers.[1]

Matthew Arnold's prose works were considerably larger in bulk than his poems, and he was among the great English literary critics, though his standards of judgment may not now command willing assent. He was of his time in concentrating attention upon the moral values of poetry, assigning a subordinate place to poetry in which 'the form is studied and exquisite':

> It is important to hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question: How to live? . . . A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against *life*; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards *life*.[2]

Arnold's convictions in this and other matters were the outcome of the Victorian assumption that current English standards were final in morals and that *life* could be written about as a monosyllabic abstraction; but his confidence in the function of poetry as a criticism of life was based upon its effective demonstration in Wordsworth, whose work he approached as an enthusiastic interpreter.[3]

But for Matthew Arnold's elegy and a popular anthology piece, Arthur Hugh Clough (1819–61) would be scarcely known even by name to any but scholars, and it is unlikely that attempts to revive interest in his poetry as a whole will succeed. The son of a Liverpool cotton merchant, he was educated at Rugby during Dr. Arnold's headmastership, after returning from South Carolina to which his family had emigrated in 1822. He graduated at Balliol College, Oxford, and became a Fellow of Oriel College until the epidemic religious doubt engulfed him and caused him to resign, leaving Oxford for Paris and

[1] 'The Scholar-Gipsy'.

[2] *Essays in Criticism* (2nd series, 1888; the 1st series appeared in 1865). His other major prose works are *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) and *Literature and Dogma* (1873).

[3] See the preface to his Wordsworth selection in the Golden Treasury series (London, Macmillan, 1879).

Rome. He became Principal of University Hall, London, from 1849 to 1852, and thereafter held government appointments as an education official.

Clough's principal work in verse, *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich: A Long-Vacation Pastoral* (1848), is an account in hexameters of the falling in love of an Oxford student with the daughter of a Highland farmer, as the outcome of a university reading-party in Scotland. It has many personal and topical references and received much immediate praise. *Ambarvalia* (1849) contained lyrics by himself, and others by a now completely forgotten friend, Thomas Burbridge; and in the same year appeared *Amours de Voyage*, a novel in verse. *Dipsychus* (posthumously 1869) is a satirical treatment of 'the conflict between a tender conscience and the world'. The lyric beginning 'Say not the struggle naught availeth' (one of the *Ambarvalia* poems), which has survived more on account of its comforting sentiments than through poetic merit, reached its widest popularity when quoted by Winston Churchill for encouragement in the darkest days of World War II. Poetry then became indeed for the moment a criticism of life.

The final literary rank of Coventry Patmore (1823–96) has yet to be settled, if it ever can be settled on æsthetic rather than doctrinal grounds. Four groups of poems—*The Betrothal* (1854), *The Espousals* (1856), *Faithful for Ever* (1860), and *The Victories of Love* (1862)—constitute *The Angel in the House*, a prolonged celebration of wedded love which evokes nausea in those who find its connubility excessive, its association of religious feeling and uxorious domestic sentiment incongruous, and its verse-style glib. But others, whose perceptions may go deeper, are not so affected and find Patmore 'inexhaustibly full of poetry'.[1] He became a Roman Catholic in 1864 and later published (1877) the more metaphysical and mystical series of poems, *The Unknown Eros*, by which he must ultimately be judged.

An indispensable footnote to Dr. Arnold's regime at Rugby is provided in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes

[1] See Frederick Page's Introduction to *The Poems of Coventry Patmore* (Oxford Standard Authors, 1949).

(1822–96), who issued it as the work of 'An Old Boy'. While it has delighted many generations as an unsurpassed and most

Illustration from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*

probably unequalled story of school life, it also has a place in the history of education and was in its special way as influential as Arnold's own system.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LONG AFTERNOON

By the end of 1840, when Victoria had reigned less than four years, most of the future anti-Victorian or non-Victorian writers were already born. In 1850 the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood issued *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*, a periodical which ceased with the fourth number and appears mild and even dull now, but which nevertheless had a long-term effect beyond the imagining of its founders. Most of the paintings of Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais and their followers are entirely Victorian in sentiment, though their attention to naturalistic detail stirred much contemporary antagonism. Indeed, Nature is a disruptive master serving purposes for which no allowance was made in Pre-Raphaelite theory.

The P.R.B. was primarily a painters' movement, and as a corporate association it disintegrated within a few years. Its main link with literature was through Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82), and the (delayed) publication of most of his original poems in 1870 brought him under censure by Robert Buchanan (1841–1901), a once-popular verse-writer and novelist who is remembered only in ridicule as the author of an article on Rossetti and others (*Contemporary Review*, October 1871), attacking them as 'the fleshly school of poetry', one of those misconceived diatribes through which indiscreet moralists are prone to advertise and popularize the thing they would suppress. Buchanan's phrase is, however, a pointer to a contemporary trend which at the Victorian noontide was foreshadowing the long afternoon of challenge to certain major assumptions of the age.

The liberal and humanitarian impulses of the great majority of 'advanced' Victorians were confined to matters of political and social reform. Enlightenment in that direction was rarely accompanied by an equivalent perception of the possibility, still less of the need, of beneficial changes of attitude in religion and morals. This conjunction on different levels of radicalism and reaction has been common in other ages, but social

sanctions had become more powerful and wider in reach in Victorian times than previously.

The case of the Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell who in 1890 was driven from political eminence to disgrace on account of moral nonconformity, and the case of Charles Bradlaugh who fought from 1880 to 1886 for the right to take his seat in Parliament without swearing on the Bible at the administration of the oath, indicate the weight of moral and religious conventionalism burdening those who ignored the code and those who sought, independently of self-interest, to establish liberty of belief and opinion.

The sensitiveness of the Victorians in regard to sexual behaviour was unconsciously determined by a combination of the property sense and shamefaced contempt of the body. Public opinion forced upon literature an artificial 'purity' which was in truth a morbid emasculation, which Thackeray and Trollope, among others, chafed against but did not in practice contest. Later, Hardy was to encounter noisier opposition, and although in the book versions (as distinct from the serializations) of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* he wrote as he pleased, he deliberately ended his career as a novelist in consequence of their brutally stupid reception.[1]

When *Jude the Obscure* appeared in 1895 Hardy had been publishing for a quarter of a century; and while his sixteen volumes of fiction were relieved by a good deal of the finest comedy in English literature, his largely joyless cast of mind and sceptical outlook were a negation of much that was characteristic in the general Victorian temper and sentiment. But it was not from him that the first blast of the trumpet against the walls of Victorianism came. He was in fact no defiant trumpeter. Swinburne's 1866 series of *Poems and Ballads* was a far more spectacular performance, and Buchanan as a self-appointed champion of Victorian morality had already in his inept manner satirized Swinburne in 1866 before making Rossetti the chief butt in the 'fleshly school' article five years later.

In Browning alone among the greater mid-Victorians is there any frank admission of vital partnership between sensual

[1] See *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* by Richard L. Purdy (Oxford University Press, 1954) for an account of the publishing history of the novels.

aptitudes and spiritual health. In the *Fra Lippo Lippi* monologue the errant painter pleads against the censorious prior for the recognition of the dual rights of body and soul, rights stated or tacitly implied in other poems by Browning, who also invests the primary relationship with a degree of human warmth absent from most literature in his heyday. Tennyson wrote love poetry which provides remarkably little communicated emotion; and although it was impossible for him to traverse the Arthurian legends without facing the theme of adultery, he treated the illicit passions with bloodless detachment.

Nevertheless it was one of Tennyson's cherished friends, Edward Fitzgerald (1809–83), who was responsible for a poem entirely foreign to the Victorian spirit, which appeared as early as 1859. Fitzgerald was born in Suffolk and lived there most of his life, largely in seclusion, yet maintaining contact with the world through his friendships with the Tennysons, Carlyle, Thackeray, and other men of letters, and finding active pleasure in yachting. *Euphranor, a Dialogue on Youth* (1851) and *Polonius: a Collection of Wise Saws and Modern Instances* (1852) received little attention, while the only book on which his name appeared, *Six Dramas of Calderon freely translated* (1853), was attacked for having too much of Fitzgerald imposed upon the Spanish original. It was as a free translator that Fitzgerald was most productive, and he insisted that his aim was not to keep close to his authors' texts, but to create in English readers impressions and sensations corresponding to those produced abroad by the originals.

In 1859, after it had lain unused for the best part of two years in the hands of the editor of *Fraser's Magazine*, Fitzgerald brought out as a paper-covered booklet his rendering of the so-called quatrains of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Persian astronomer-poet Omar Khayyám. There were no reviews of the poem and next to no copies were sold. Its bookseller-publisher, Bernard Quaritch, banished it to the penny box outside his shop, where it was brought to the notice of Rossetti and by him to Swinburne's. Their enthusiasm, spread rapidly to others, lifted remaining copies into the rare-book class and the Omar cult began. The question of how far the poem is Omar's and how far Fitzgerald's own is a matter for scholars to argue—as

indeed they have long continued to do. As to its tone, Carlyle said, 'my old friend Fitzgerald might have spent his time to much better purpose than in busying himself with the verses of that old Mohammedan blackguard.'[1] Ruskin, on the other hand, wrote surprisingly that he had never 'read anything so glorious'; while Tennyson, in dedicating *Tiresias* to Fitzgerald in the early 1880s, called it

> . . . your golden Eastern lay,
> Than which I know no version done
> In English more divinely well.

The spell cast upon successive generations by the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* can only be ascribed to the intoxicating verse-form adopted by Fitzgerald—the four-line stanza rhyming in its first, second, and fourth lines—for when the original has since been re-presented in translations claiming to be more scholarly and accurate the magic of Fitzgerald's version is lost. The hedonistic allure, the luscious melancholy, the rose-scented cynicism, the enervation of delight in love and wine and poetry would be suspect to the English mind without the sensuous enchantment of sound which is no stronger in the now hackneyed passages than in stanzas with little intelligible significance to the vast majority of Fitzgerald's readers: e.g.

> They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
> And Bahrám, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass
> Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his sleep.

Though the *Rubáiyát* was independent of 'the fleshly school', its earliest enthusiasts were inevitably those poets—Rossetti and Swinburne—whose own work plays upon the senses before it reaches the mind.

The Italian ancestry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti was no doubt accountable for the two strains—of asceticism and sensuality—evident both in his paintings and in his poetry. While Rossetti's religious pictures have traces of the austerity of Italian primitives, his portraits of physically abundant young women are at once sensuous and deathly, hovering between time and eternity.

[1] See *The Life of Edward Fitzgerald*, by Alfred McKinley Terhune (Oxford University Press, 1947).

He took to art while still a boy, studied at the Royal Academy, and became one of the leaders of the P.R.B. The first version of his still best-known poem, 'The Blessed Damozel', was printed in *The Germ*, and in its familiar completed form it serves as a conspectus of the double nature of Rossetti's work and of his divergence from current standards. Whereas the true Victorians either idealized or sentimentalized their women as half-angels, Rossetti's damozel, a ten-year angel leaning out 'from the gold bar of Heaven', is still possessed by the womanly—or fleshly—love she had experienced on earth: as 'the souls mounting up to God went by her like thin flames'

> . . . still she bowed herself and stooped
> Out of the circling charm;
> Until her bosom must have made
> The bar she leaned on warm;

and she prays to be re-united with him she loved:

> 'We two,' she said, 'will seek the groves
> Where the lady Mary is,
> With her five handmaidens, whose names
> Are five sweet symphonies,
> Cicely, Gertrude, Magdalen,
> Margaret and Rosalys.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'There will I ask of Christ the Lord
> Thus much for him and me:—
> Only to live as once on earth
> With Love,—only to be,
> As then awhile, for ever now
> Together, I and he.'

Rossetti's poetry, considered objectively, may be found over-pictorial and inadequately provided with intellectual content; it may be dispraised as the product of a decadent Romanticism; yet it engages faculties which had been long neglected and in being neglected had impoverished the life-stream of Victorian literature. Unless their value in this respect is fully regarded, the lesser poems of Rossetti—and, strictly judged, the majority are lesser—invite mockery: 'Sister Helen' is a parodist's elementary temptation, and 'The House of Life' sequence of sonnets and songs is barely saved by sincerity of feeling from becoming a verse confection, pleasant but cloying.

Rossetti suffered from an emotional overplus which led him into the notorious extravagance of burying his poems with his wife, the fateful and fated Elizabeth Siddal whose consumptive beauty fascinated the Rossetti circle. When she died from an overdose of opiate in 1862, two years after their marriage, Rossetti plunged into an abyss of remorse which had its farcically grisly sequel some years later when he allowed the manuscripts to be recovered from the grave, and published them in 1870. Besides his original poetry, Rossetti's work includes a large body of translations from Dante (notably *La Vita Nuova*, The New Life) and other early Italian poets.

Rossetti received a modicum of higher education at King's College, London, before turning to art, while Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), who became his chief follower, had the English gentleman's public school and university upbringing at Eton and Oxford, absorbing liberally from Greek, French, and Italian as well as English literature. Shedding orthodox religious and political views, he turned to the extreme republicanism which inspired *A Song of Italy* (1867), *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), and the rest of his large output of political verse. Swinburne's published poetry began with two plays, *The Queen Mother* and *Rosamond* (1860), but in *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) he was first heard as the master of a new music, richer than English poetry had known before. Not only in the rhymed choruses of *Atalanta* but also in the blank verse there is a unique lyrical quality—e.g.:

> Maiden, and mistress of the months and stars
> Now folded in the flowerless fields of heaven . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Night, a black hound, follows the white fawn day,
> Swifter than dreams the white flown feet of sleep . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The rain that ripens and the drought that slays,
> The sand that swallows and the spring that feeds . . .

These lines illustrate, also, Swinburne's use or misuse of alliteration, his besetting habit. While alliteration has a sound and ancient ancestry, its use in Anglo-Saxon verse was mainly structural,[1] whereas in Swinburne's it is mainly ornamental

[1] See Ward: I, pp. 4–6.

and therefore tends, like all applied ornament, to become trivial or weakening when employed unsparingly. In passages where austerity both of movement and of statement would be fitting—as in the following from 'Tristram of Lyonesse' (1882)—alliteration clogs the reader's attention and lowers the tone and intensity:

> Nor shall they feel or fear, whose date is done,
> Aught that made once more dark the living sun
> And bitterer in their breathing lips the breath
> Than the dark dawn and bitter dust of death.
> For all the light, with fragrance as of flowers,
> That clothes the lithe live limbs of separate hours,
> More sweet to savour and more clear to sight
> Dawns on the soul death's undivided night.
> No vigils has that perfect night to keep,
> No fever-fits of vision shake that sleep.

Swinburne held, commendably, that 'the first duty of a singer is to sing', but a poet also needs to embody in his singing some positive contribution to thought. Whatever body of thought there may be in Swinburne's poetry is still largely a matter of critical speculation: his singing is so persistent and so potent in its siren quality that we must stop our ears before we can know what he is saying.

Atalanta brought praise from a select audience; *Poems and Ballads* (1866) brought wide notoriety and intemperate condemnation. Swinburne's own life paid no regard to Victorian standards of moral conduct, though it may be doubted that he was as familiar with strange sins as some of the heatedly febrile poems in the 1866 volume suggested. He was saved from further consequences of undisciplined living by Theodore Watts-Dunton (1832–1914), who took him in charge from 1879 and set up the household in Putney of which Sir Max Beerbohm's essay 'No. 2 The Pines'[1] gives an immortally comic yet sympathetic first-hand glimpse.

Watts-Dunton was himself a tight-jacketed solicitor who turned from the law and achieved literary success with a gipsy novel, *Aylwin* (1898), after publishing in the previous year a collection of poems on gipsy themes, *The Coming of Love*, both

[1] Included in the volume entitled *And Even Now* (Heinemann, London, 1920).

books being in some measure the outcome of his acquaintance with George Borrow, whose *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye* he edited with reminiscential introductions in 1893 and 1900. He also acquired a high reputation as a literary critic with essays contributed to the *Athenæum* and *Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature* (1903), republished (1916) in *Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder*, the latter part of the title being his phrase for the special achievement of the Romantic poets. But apart from his actual published writings Watts-Dunton obtained an apocryphal fame for a great critical work which was long expected but never produced. *Aylwin* continues to be read, but Watts-Dunton is chiefly remembered as Swinburne's guardian; remembered without gratitude by those who are convinced that while he preserved the man he destroyed the poet, for after 1879 Swinburne's poetry became, in goodness and badness, less compelling than his earlier work, though not everything of the later period can be dismissed as mediocre. He imbibed freely from Villon, Gautier, Baudelaire and other French 'decadent' writers, and the disturbing tendencies of *Poems and Ballads* probably derived as much, if not more, from such literary sources as from flowers of evil in Swinburne's personal make-up. He was an enthusiastic hater not only of oppression but also of convention; and just as his political poems were dedicated to liberty in affairs, his sensual poems were in some measure a defiant exercise in fist-shaking against moral intolerance. In regard to physical love, their inclination is directed by the sexual fantasies of Swinburne's protracted adolescence rather than by adult passion:

> O daughters of dreams and of stories
> That life is not wearied of yet,
> Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores,
> Félise and Yolande and Juliette,
> Shall I find you not still, shall I miss you,
> When sleep, that is true or that seems,
> Comes back to me hopeless to kiss you,
> O daughters of dreams?[1]

The bitter blossoms of fierce kisses, the lips intertwisted and bitten, the bruised throats and bosoms, the heaving limbs, the dead desires and barren lusts of 'Laus Veneris', 'Fragoletta',

[1] 'Dedication 1865'.

'Faustine', 'Dolores', 'Félise', and others in the 1866 volume of *Poems and Ballads* breached the moral complacency of the Victorian generation and had their delayed sequel in the Decadent Movement of the 1890s which culminated in the downfall of Oscar Wilde. The two later series (1878 and 1889) of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* were less startling, the outstanding piece in the second series being the fine 'Ave Atque Vale' in memory of Baudelaire. Though the third series included a rapturous idealizing sonnet on Nell Gwyn as 'Lady of Laughter' and 'Lady of Pity', it also included 'A Baby's Epitaph', an early token of Swinburne's subsequent gushing preoccupation with infant charms.

Seven years after Swinburne's frontal attack on contemporary moral assumptions, a prose work intended to present innocuous 'studies in poetry and art' was thrust by certain of its readers into the role of an antinomian æsthetico-moral manifesto. *The Renaissance* (1873) contained the first work of Walter Pater (1839–94), an Oxford don of Dutch descent who was without evident vices and even avoided such modest indulgences as tea-drinking and smoking. In his late teens he contracted a deep and lasting admiration for Ruskin's prose, and as an art critic he may be regarded as a disciple who in clarity of perception and precision of statement excelled his master, Ruskin. His whole life was concentrated upon study and writing, and although lionized for a time in London literary circles he was an unresponsive lion whose natural habitat was an Oxford college.

The Renaissance contained essays on Leonardo, Botticelli, and other Italian painters; the poetry of Michelangelo; the sixteenth-century French poet, du Bellay, and the eighteenth-century philosopher-critic, Winckelmann; and on two early French stories. Like Ruskin's, Pater's writings on art consisted much less of formal criticism than of the translation of visual material into written language. However illegitimate this process may be from the standpoint of æsthetics, it has at least made Pater's disquisition on Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (*La Gioconda*) famous to a multitude of English readers who may never have seen the original painting. The final essay in *The Renaissance* bore the commonplace heading 'Conclusion', but its few pages had an unforeseen revolutionary impact upon the minds and

subsequent conduct of young intellectuals. Its immediate effect was such that Pater withdrew the Conclusion from the second edition, restoring it afterwards with 'some slight changes which bring it closer to my original meaning'.[1] What he propounded there may be called *the philosophy of the Moment*:

> . . . Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us,—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. . . . What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy. . . .

Unlike those young men who constituted themselves his disciples, Pater had no urge to pass from the testing of new opinions and the courting of new impressions to the cultivation of new sensations. While his adventurousness was solely in the mental sphere, they gave the 'mood of passion' a fuller interpretation. By them his rhetorical inquiry, 'How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their fullest energy?' was answered by practical experiment in whatever paths life opened up. They read in the Conclusion:

> Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness.

It was through art, Pater added, that such great passions, such ecstasy, such quickened and multiplied consciousness, could be experienced. Since the life-pulse, it would seem, beat moderately if not faintly in him, art was his appropriate mode of ingress to this intenser range of experience. To Oscar Wilde, then an undergraduate at Oxford, and already conditioned in part by Swinburne's poetry, art was much, but not nearly enough: for him the philosophy of the Moment reached its conclusion in Reading Gaol.

[1] This was a disingenuous statement, for the two versions are identical in all but a few words which have no bearing on the whole.

George Meredith[1] published in 1862 the connected series of poems called *Modern Love*, presenting the reverse aspect of married love to that which was being contemporaneously displayed by Coventry Patmore in *The Angel in the House*. Meredith's account of tragic disharmony and separation which ends in the suicide of the wife, is in part his own story, for his marriage to Thomas Love Peacock's daughter was disastrously incompatible. The poem is desperately moving and emotionally dignified, but in the 1860s and for long after it outraged those, and they were in an overwhelming majority, who refused to countenance any suggestion that matrimony could be in particular instances, for few or many, an unholy alliance. *Modern Love* contains much fine poetry (in particular the lovely stanza xlvii beginning 'We saw the swallows gathering in the sky') and (in st. xliii) the most quoted of Meredith's lines:

> In tragic life, God wot,
> No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
> We are betrayed by what is false within.

The wife, having taken poison, calls the husband to her bedside in the night:

> Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
> The union of this ever-diverse pair!
> These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
> Condemned to do the flitting of a bat.
> Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
> They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:
> But they fed not on the advancing hours:
> Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
> Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
> Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
> Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
> When hot for certainties in this our life!—
> In tragic hints here see what evermore
> Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
> Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
> To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

The chill of truth was seeping into the Victorian domestic hothouse.

[1] See below, pp. 257 ff.

CHAPTER XVIII

NINETEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA

Most of the doings in the English theatres between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the 1860s had nothing to do with contemporary literary drama; and most of the literary drama written during that time had little to do with the practical needs of the theatre. From the sixteenth century onward to the present day, poets have flirted or formed illegitimate connections with the stage and produced a depressingly large number of bastard works which have small merit as poems and none at all as plays. Where some temporary success in the theatre attended such misbegotten pieces, it was due either to the skill or ingenuity of popular actors or to the readiness of audiences to submit themselves to a session of dullness and bewilderment at the behest of fashion and spurious culture. Poetry is mainly a subjective art; whether lyrical or narrative it is extruded from the poet's inner consciousness. Drama is objective; the playwright must project and multiply himself into a host of personalities not himself, among them some who may be abhorrent to himself yet are allowed independence of speech and action according to their lights. Moreover, the non-dramatic poet needs nothing but himself and pen and paper; or even less—himself and his own speaking voice. But drama is a composite art with complex practical demands involving actors and all the technicians needed to bring a play to birth on the stage; involving, too, the audience that becomes an integral and ever-variable factor in the performance of a play. If all these must serve the playwright, no less must the playwright serve all these: he must shed the egotism which may be the poet's source of strength, and become the instructed servant of the stage. Any notion that a poet, however abundant his poetic gift may be, can leap into the theatre as a ready-made playwright is a presumption of the ignorant. The world's great playwrights have invariably served some apprenticeship to the theatre; they have been men of the theatre, learning the craft as actors, administrators, or instructed critics.

Those great nineteenth-century poets who wrote at times in the dramatic form—most of them did—have left nothing but stage lumber. The bulk of it is also literary lumber, amid which some few passages of splendid rhetorical verse may be found, but no single work that is wholly alive: for the life of a play is, first and last, in living characters, and the ability to create such characters was not within the scope of Shelley or Byron or Tennyson. Though Tennyson had more success in the theatre than the other poets of the century, the credit must go to Henry Irving as actor and producer—and adapter—rather than to the Poet Laureate as author. At Irving's death in 1905, *Queen Mary* (1875), *The Cup* (1881), and *Becket* (1884) died also from the stage. Browning's considerably smaller success with *Strafford* (1837) and *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (1843) must stir some surprise and curious speculation, for Browning came nearer to possessing a genuine dramatic gift than any other poet since the seventeenth century. That he had the necessary protean quality of mind is shown in his many dramatic monologues, where he presents with fervour a wide variety of opinions and convictions other than his own. But his adoption and perfection of the layered monologue form was no doubt a tactful acceptance of his self-recognized inability to control simultaneously a stageful of characters in action. The persons in his dramatic monologues are mentally-conceived shadows: shadows of substance, but not bodied forth as three-dimensional figures. There is no complete parturition, no final separation of the created from their creator, but always a continuing thread of attachment.

With the failures of the poets and the popular successes of a ragged regiment of minor playwrights, the earlier nineteenth-century drama presents in retrospect a melancholy picture. The theatre of the period was essentially an actors' theatre. Of dramatic literature—i.e. of plays which have merit both as drama and as literature—there was none. Theatre managers engaged 'dramatic authors' as little more than employed henchmen to provide pieces fitted to the idiosyncrasies of particular actors or the known taste of local audiences. Douglas Jerrold (1803–57), a typical author of that class, was so employed at the Coburg Theatre (which later became the Old Vic) and afterwards at the Surrey Theatre, both on the south side of the Thames and providing the kind of dramatic

entertainment which, from being acted in playhouses 'across the bridges', was known generically and scornfully as 'transpontine melodrama'. Jerrold's *Fifteen Years of a Drunkard's Life* (1828) is characteristic of the kind, as his *Black-Ey'd Susan; or All in the Downs* (1829) is of the nautical pieces which, with musical interpolations, had been popularized by Charles Dibdin (1745–1814), whose light ballad-opera *The Waterman* (1774) long remained in the popular repertory.

The relative or total failure of the great poets' essays in poetic drama is less surprising than the periodical revival through several decades of similar pieces by lesser men. Among these the *Ion* (1836) of Sir Thomas Talfourd (1795–1854) was outstanding, though in few tragedies can the characters have had less blood in their veins. The eighteenth-century tradition of rhetorical acting lingered on, however, to the middle of the next century, and *Ion* stood high among the pseudo-classical tragedies fitted to the declamatory style. The prolific talent of Sheridan Knowles (1784–1862) was partially addressed to similar ends and his tragedies have been similarly discarded. Only *The Hunchback* (1832) among his plays of a less unnatural class is now occasionally regarded with interest as an example of the popular sentimental romantic drama, a genre to which Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons; or, Love and Pride* (1838) also belongs.

Lord Lytton (1803–73) brought to the theatre the gifts which had already served him well as a novelist, notably the power of compelling interest even when his treatment of good material is only second-rate. His historical novels are still enthralling to young unexacting readers, while his historical play *Richelieu* (1838), an excellent display-piece for Macready from the 1830s and for Irving some half-century later, is not entirely outmoded as material for bravura acting. But Lytton's major contribution to the drama of his generation was *Money* (1840), a moral comedy of love and cupidity, in which the sentimentality and staginess of the contemporary drama are moderated by genuine emotion between Clara Douglas and Alfred Evelyn and by genuine criticism of human behaviour in the reactions of Evelyn's acquaintances to his alternating fortunes. In perspective the faults of the play are more apparent than its merits, for it hovers between the comedy of Sheridan and the wit of Oscar

Wilde without attaining the level of either. Sentences that a more accomplished writer would have phrased as brilliant epigrams fall into flat commonplace through Lytton's insufficient verbal skill, but the play has substance. It is in touch with life, and though the characters more often make speeches than converse naturally, there are at least moments when naturalness breaks through, pointing to possibilities that T. W. Robertson was to develop in the next generation.

Another novelist, Charles Reade (1814–84), had considerable success as a playwright, chiefly with *The Courier of Lyons* (1854) which, renamed *The Lyons Mail*, was the vehicle of one of Irving's greatest triumphs. Reade's long-popular morality-melodrama *Drink* (1879) was an adaptation of Zola's *L'Assommoir*, while in collaboration with Tom Taylor (1817–80) he wrote *Masks and Faces* (1852), a frequently revived comedy introducing David Garrick and Peg Woffington. Taylor was by turns a university professor, a barrister, a civil servant (as Secretary to the Board of Health), a journalist, biographer, and editor of *Punch*, as well as a playwright. Though his best-known plays, *Still Waters Run Deep* (1855) and *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863), are intrinsically of small account, they, too, show a pioneer trend towards the naturalistic drama which was on the way.

Nevertheless, the mid nineteenth-century theatre found its most congenial exercise in melodrama, and melodrama found its most fertile provider in Dion Boucicault (1822–90), who began as an actor and went on to write well over a hundred plays, including *The Corsican Brothers* (1848) and *The Colleen Bawn* (1859). Boucicault's main line of appeal was through a combination of elaborate stage spectacle with startling effects, robust action, and simple humour and emotionalism. Around the end of the century it became the fashion to treat his work with derision and contempt, yet within his contemporary setting and within the limits of popular taste he was a remarkably skilled craftsman, using the restricted available means to achieve on that smaller scale something akin to what the cinema 'feature film' now achieves with its unlimited resources.

Visual and material realism in the staging of plays became a main object of managerial concern long before any movement developed for realism in the verbal, emotional, and intellectual

content of the plays to be staged. In scenery, costumes, and accessories Irving at the Lyceum Theatre aimed increasingly at accuracy as well as magnificence; at Drury Lane until about 1914 plays, written to order, worked up to a spectacular 'realistic' scene in which a horse-race with real horses, a sand-storm with real sand, a flood with real water, or some other calamity employing real this, that, or the other provided a sensational thrill. Meanwhile, the Bancrofts (Squire Bancroft and his wife Marie Wilton) had introduced another kind of realism at their Prince of Wales's Theatre (formerly the Queen's, now the Scala) when they opened there in 1865. Instead of painted cloth, they used doors and windows that could be opened and shut and sought to create the illusion that life as it was represented on the stage was life as it was lived within four walls, with only the fourth wall removed to permit the audience to look in. This new naturalistic method of staging required a new naturalistic kind of play, and the man to provide it was at hand.

Thomas William Robertson (1829–71) came of a stage family, being himself the eldest of twenty-two children and the brother of Madge Robertson who became the esteemed actress Mrs. Kendal. He started his theatre career as a man-of-all-work—actor, scene-painter, composer, playwright—but though he wrote much before 1864 it was only then that he won success with *David Garrick*, a play which displayed no tendency to depart from current popular standards. In the next year, however, his *Society* (1865) began the series of plays which, with the practical co-operation of the Bancrofts, were to give T. W. Robertson both immediate fame in the theatre and lasting fame in literary history. Reading or seeing *Society*, *Ours* (1866), *Caste* (1867), or *School* (1869) for the first time with twentieth-century eyes may be a disappointing experience to those who have heard them lauded as initiating a revolutionary change of direction in English drama. In certain respects they are almost laughably old-fashioned: the language is stilted, some of the characters speak and behave in a manner incredible to us, and the plots are thin. Yet when the total effect of *Caste*, for example, is considered, there can remain no doubt that the characters and situations have a basic reality. Robertson opened the doors of the stage and let life in, whereas for nearly a century play-

wrights had been chiefly concerned to keep life out and to make the theatre a refuge from reality, even a fortress against reality. Even if no more than a grudging estimate is made of Robertson's personal accomplishment in his plays, it is enough that he indicated new paths, even though his own limited intellectual equipment qualified him to take but a few steps along them. *Caste* has nevertheless settled firmly in place as a minor classic.

Up to that time the main foreign influence upon nineteenth-century English playwrights had come from France, through the mechanical well-carpentered stage successes of Eugène Scribe (1791–1861) and of Victorien Sardou (1831–1908) whose *Dora*, translated in collaboration by the dramatic critic Clement Scott as *Diplomacy* (1878), was to be one of the favourite standbys of the reactionaries of the English theatre in the closing period of the century. Clement Scott (1841–1904) came into further prominence as a leader of the reactionaries when, after the first performance of Ibsen's *Ghosts* in English, he attacked the play and its author with almost the whole vocabulary of abuse.[1]

The first of Ibsen's plays to reach the English stage was *A Doll's House*, acted in London in William Archer's translation in 1889, ten years after the original appearance in Norway. A quarter of a century had then gone by since Robertson's new beginning, and in the meantime two other and more accomplished playwrights, Henry Arthur Jones (1851–1929) and A. W. Pinero (1855–1934) began to count in the English theatre.

Jones's first successful work was no more than an old-style melodrama, *The Silver King* (1882), written in collaboration with the otherwise forgotten Henry Herman, but *Saints and Sinners* (1884) marked the beginning of Jones's more serious work, through which he became a pioneer of the new drama of ideas in which moral and social problems were handled though rarely grasped. Pinero turned to playwriting in 1877 after more than ten years of acting, and had his first resounding successes from 1885 to 1895 with a series of still laughable farces—the best of them being *The Magistrate* (1885), *The Schoolmistress* (1886), and *The Amazons* (1895). *The Profligate* (1889) was the first of Pinero's 'problem plays', a kind in which he and Henry Arthur Jones were to specialize in rivalry until well into the

[1] In the *Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1891.

new century. By the time Pinero's masterpiece *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was performed in 1893 Ibsen's impact upon the English theatre was evident. But although this play has been commonly regarded as an Ibsenesque piece, there could be no affinity between Pinero and Ibsen. While Ibsen thought in terms of life and had the skill to present life absorbingly on the stage (he was an experienced man of the theatre), Pinero could think only in terms of the stage. His problems were spurious and his naturalism illusory, yet such was his power of dramatic make-believe that the spurious and the illusory masqueraded convincingly as genuine and real from curtain-rise to curtain-fall. He was perhaps the most beguiling conductor of a story that the English stage had known up to that time, and it was this as much as his mastery of the 'well-made' play that commanded popular success, and merits now a controlled measure of critical respect. There is in truth some ground for contesting the view that his craftsmanship was, even at its best, beyond cavil. Often the preliminary exposition is mechanical and obvious, the dialogue stilted, the situations absurd; while the customary working-up to a 'great scene' in the penultimate act leaves little but anti-climax for the final resolution. These observations are, however, the critical realization of the morning after, the time when disillusion tends to drench the enthusiasms of an overnight's enjoyed performance. Pinero did at least clear the outlines of playmaking and tidy up a slack and confused sub-literary form. Like Henry Arthur Jones he burked logical conclusions and fled in moral terror from any blast of cold truth when that was the only honest issue of even his contrived situations. But unlike Jones he avoided the escape road of melodrama, and if in sheer technical accomplishment and mounting suspense he never equalled the third act of Jones's *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900), Pinero excelled him in the general run of their work.

William Schwenck Gilbert (1836–1911) wrote numerous plays and extravaganzas and the ingenious *Bab Ballads* (1869) before he began to work in conjunction with Arthur Sullivan in 1875 on the series of comic operas which are still unsurpassed. Gilbert combined inexhaustible resource in the writing of comic verse with a comprehensive gift of light satire which he brought to bear upon the political and other foibles of his age. He

turned familiar things upside down, giving them an unfamiliar appearance which often revealed their true character and exploded illusions. His fun was surprisingly iconoclastic and critical, and Bernard Shaw acknowledged a debt to him in this respect. Gilbert's limitations and weaknesses as a satirist lay in his uncertainty of taste and in his inability to recognize the limitations of his own sympathies and understanding. His guffaws at the Æsthetic Movement in *Patience* (1881) are the boorish noises of a philistine. The target there was a legitimate one, but he aimed wildly because he could not see what the true target was. He was even less tolerable in his many gibes at the ageing unmarried women who became stock characters in the Savoy operas. Nevertheless, if Gilbert was frequently witless he was more often genuinely witty and acute; if his topical allusions now call for a glossary, he often demolished humbug and punctured folly.

The drama of the last years of the century was made illustrious by a single comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), in which Oscar Wilde (1856–1900) brought back to the English theatre something of the distinction absent from it since Sheridan ceased to write a century before. And Wilde surpassed Sheridan in combining with the sense of comedy and feeling for literary style a brilliant, audacious, and fantastic wit which does not stale and surprises with renewed delight however often heard. In Wilde's other comedies *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), and *An Ideal Husband* (1895) the incidental wit is overlaid by theatrical conventions. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* not only is the situation fresh, but the 'incredible' characters have genuine individuality and a life of their own within the orbit of their incredibility: if John Worthing and Lady Bracknell, Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble are unlike mortals they have the finer quality of immortality.

The case of Stephen Phillips (1864–1915) is a cautionary tale for those who squander discretion and critical sense in unmeasured praise of their contemporaries. His blank-verse plays *Paolo and Francesca*, *Herod*, *Ulysses*, and *Nero* were compared favourably with the works of the Greek tragic dramatists and Shakespeare, but they were gone beyond revival before his own life ended. George Alexander's and Beerbohm Tree's elaborate productions and acting skill gave them temporary popularity

in the theatre and infused the illusion of stage life into their vacuous compound of pseudo-tragedy and sentimental romance. In the climactic scene between the lovers in *Paolo and Francesca* (1899) Phillips touched the fringes of genuine feeling, though even there the taint of a cloying style is finally overwhelming. In his blank verse the Shakespeare incubus[1] gave a dying twitch.

After its long-drawn-out senescence, English drama showed signs of renewed vitality as the nineteenth century ended. Bernard Shaw's weekly theatre essays in the *Saturday Review* from January 1895 to May 1898[2] lifted dramatic criticism to a higher level that it had reached at any time before, and simultaneously he was beginning his own career as a playwright. His *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898) launched 'the New Drama' which was to be the most hopeful, the most invigorating, and the most controversial feature in English literature during the next decade.

[1] See Ward: II, pp. 196 ff.

[2] Collected in *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (Constable, London, 3 vols, 1931). Selected in *Plays and Players* (The World's Classics, 1952).

CHAPTER XIX

THE CLOSING OF AN AGE

Christina Rossetti, it is said, would never tread on any scrap of paper lest it should by chance bear the divine name in print or writing. If she thus carried reverence to its utmost limit, she did no more than extend a strict and minute logic in action to a leading principle of contemporary life. Tennyson's injunction 'Let knowledge grow from more to more, But more of reverence in us dwell' expressed the general hope of his time; yet, as knowledge grew, reverence tended to become both a lost faculty and a lost aspiration among the majority, though it was long before it was overtly repudiated or challenged. Reverence in Victorian society was at one and the same time a religious duty and a domestic and national binding force, since to revere was to obey: children revered and obeyed their parents, servants their masters, the community its laws and institutions, its standards, habits, and customs. There were, of course, agitators and rebels on occasion, when harsh labour conditions became intolerable and explosive; but these temporary departures from the norm of behaviour were not symptomatic of a reasoned iconoclasm. Nor was reason invariably their guide when iconoclasts appeared from the eighteen-sixties onward. Swinburne was a headlong charging emotionalist, and it was left to Samuel Butler (1835–1902) to start the process of slow erosion which in due course toppled walls that were proof against frontal assault.

Samuel Butler

It can be argued that the walls of the Victorian citadel fell through their own decay, and that Butler's influence was an illusory discovery after the event by the next generation. Yet though he was an original (even if erratic) thinker, and though little open account was taken of him until some thirty years after *Erewhon* was published, he was neither so uniquely original nor so unregarded[1] that no other minds were attuned to his nor

[1] The first edition sold out within a month. Butler's total lifetime profit on *Erewhon* amounted to only a little more than £62. He made no profit at all from his other dozen or so books.

ready to challenge what he challenged. If Butler had had the moral courage or the moral effrontery to issue his novel *The Way of All Flesh* soon after it was finished in 1884 (begun in 1872), instead of leaving it for posthumous publication (1903), he would without doubt have found himself at the vortex of a hurricane of protest and dissent, for he there presents the parent-child relationship as a tyranny and a torment, and leaves in ruins the conventional picture of family bliss in the Victorian household.

As grandson of the Bishop of Lichfield (Dr. Samuel Butler)—former headmaster of Shrewsbury School, where and at Cambridge Butler was educated—he was intended to enter the Church but went instead to New Zealand in 1859 as a sheep farmer, succeeding well enough to return to England in 1864 and pass the rest of his life in modest comfort. He published an account of the New Zealand experience in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* (1863) and in 1872 his Utopian satire *Erewhon* (i.e. 'nowhere') appeared. Erewhon is imagined as a region cut off from contact with the outside world by a virtually impassable mountain barrier which the narrator nevertheless at length surmounts, to find himself among people 'of a physical beauty which was simply amazing' who, as he learns, treat ugliness, disease, and poverty as punishable crimes, and crime as a misfortune to be corrected by 'a class of men trained in soul-craft, whom they call straighteners, as nearly as I can translate a word which means "one who bends back the crooked"'. They hold, moreover, that 'unalloyed virtue is not a thing to be immoderately indulged in', 'urge that there is much pseudo-virtue going about', and that those men 'are best who are not remarkable either for vice or virtue'. Butler's sceptical attitude towards the institutional religion of his own country is displayed with acute irony in the chapter on 'The Musical Banks' of Erewhon, while chapters on the Erewhonian 'Colleges of Unreason' satirize by implication the English educational system:

> A man's business, they hold is to think as his neighbours do, for Heaven help him if he thinks good what they count bad. . . . 'It is not our business [the Professor of Worldly Wisdom declares] to help students to think for themselves. . . . Our duty is to ensure that they shall think as we do.' . . . He said it was as immoral to

> be too far in front of one's age as to lag too far behind it. . . . There were some here who seemed to devote themselves to the avoidance of every opinion with which they were not perfectly familiar, and regarded their own brains as a sort of sanctuary, to which if an opinion had once resorted, none other was to attack it.

However parabolically Butler's views on religion and education, on the treatment of disease and crime, were expressed in this pseudo-fictional manner, their undermining purpose in relation to contemporary ideas and practices could not be mistaken, nor was their comprehensive irreverence towards current ideals likely to be observed without resentment. Their long-term effect can be judged from various signs apparent by the end of the century. For example, the chill wind of economics in Bernard Shaw's early plays originates in a conviction identical with an Erewhonian argument that 'they will sooner gain their end by appealing to men's pockets . . . than to their heads'. At the middle of the twentieth century the most impressive part of *Erewhon* was in the three chapters on machines, where the possibility that mechanism will supersede man is considered by the writer of 'The Book of the Machines'. Saying that children may in time learn the differential calculus in infancy from their mothers or nurses, the imaginary author is made to say:

> . . . We cannot calculate on any corresponding advance in man's intellectual or physical powers which shall be a set-off against the far greater development which seems in store for the machines. Some people may say that man's moral influence will suffice to rule them; but I cannot think it will ever be safe to repose much trust in the moral sense of any machine. . . . I fear none of the existing machines; what I fear is the extraordinary rapidity with which they are becoming something very different to what they are at present. No class of beings have in any time past made so rapid a movement forward. Should not that movement be jealously watched, and checked while we can still check it?

Warned by this and much else in 'The Book of the Machines' the Erewhonians destroy all mechanical inventions of the preceding 271 years (back to A.D. 1600 by our reckoning), 'a period which was agreed upon by all parties after several years of wrangling as to whether a certain kind of mangle

which was much in use among washerwomen should be saved or no'.

Butler conducted for many years a guerrilla war against Charles Darwin, whose conclusions he combatted in *Life and Habit* (1877), *Evolution Old and New* (1879), *Luck or Cunning* (1887), and other works. He held that the theory of natural selection and the survival of the fittest robbed men of their potentialities for progress by means of mental evolution and the hereditary transmission of acquired habits—a controversy discussed in some detail by Bernard Shaw in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah*. The Erewhonian conviction that excess of virtue is to be deplored as well as excess of vice is a pointer to Butler's acceptance of the Greek principle 'Nothing too much'. His attraction to classical literature led him to undertake prose translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and to argue that the latter was written by a woman (*The Authoress of the Odyssey*, 1897). In 1901 he published *Erewhon Revisited*, concerned largely with the new religion centred upon himself which the visitor finds was set up after his escape by balloon ascent on the earlier occasion.

George Meredith and Henry James

As a publisher's reader of manuscripts George Meredith (1828–1909) rejected *Erewhon* and also Hardy's first novel. Butler's book found another publisher; Hardy accepted Meredith's advice that he should use 'more plot' and thereby committed himself to a major fault in his novels, which are blemished by contrived incidents and too obviously planned coincidences. In thus directing Hardy's genius, Meredith curiously indicated a path that was foreign to himself. His own genius as a novelist was as nearly independent of story-telling as is possible in fiction. Like Hardy he was essentially a poet, and, also like him, he wrote poems before turning novelist. But whereas Hardy withheld his early poems until after he closed his career as a novelist, Meredith's first book was the *Poems* issued in 1851. Between that date and the appearance of his earliest novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), he published two volumes of shorter fiction, *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1855) and *Farina* (1857). Not until thirty years had passed did he reach any large

HERE BEGINNETH THE TALES OF CANTERBURY AND FIRST THE PROLOGUE THEREOF

WHAN THAT Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye,
So priketh hem nature in hir corages;
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

BIFIL that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay,
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght were come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.

50. The opening page of *The Kelmscott Chaucer*

51. Oscar Wilde by S. P. Hall

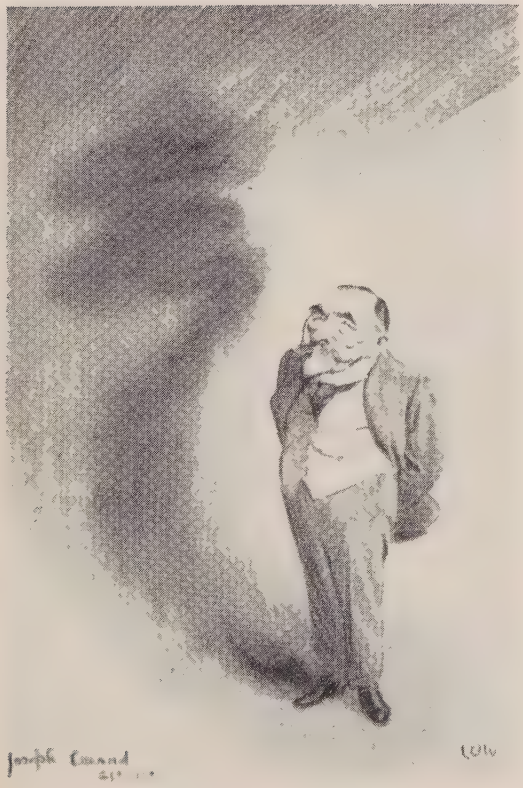
52. Poster for *It's Never Too Late to Mend* by Charles Reade

53. Henry Irving in Tennyson's *Becket*

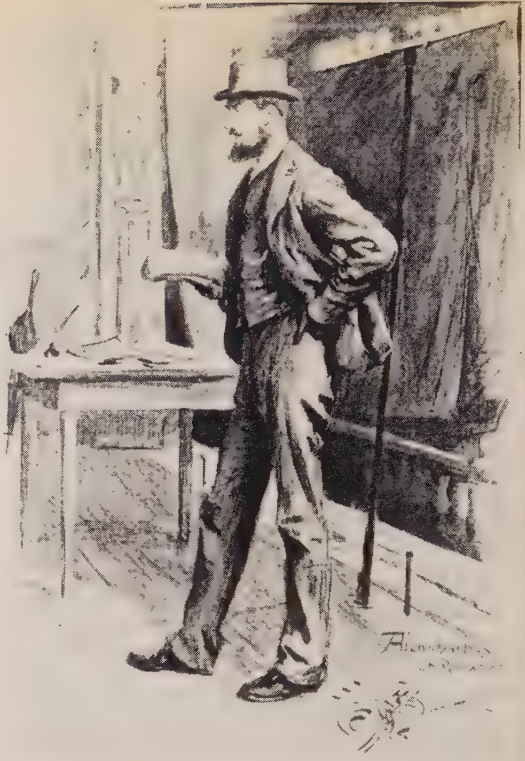
54. *George Moore in Paris* by Manet

55. W. B. Yeats by Augustus John

56. Thomas Hardy by Augustus John

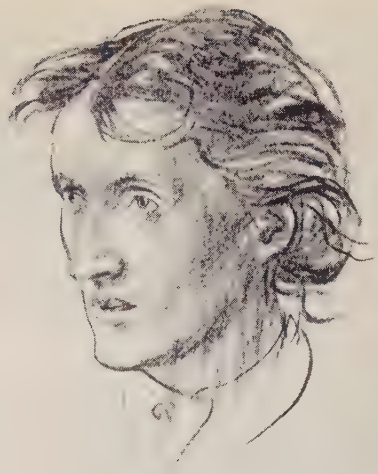


57. Joseph Conrad by Low



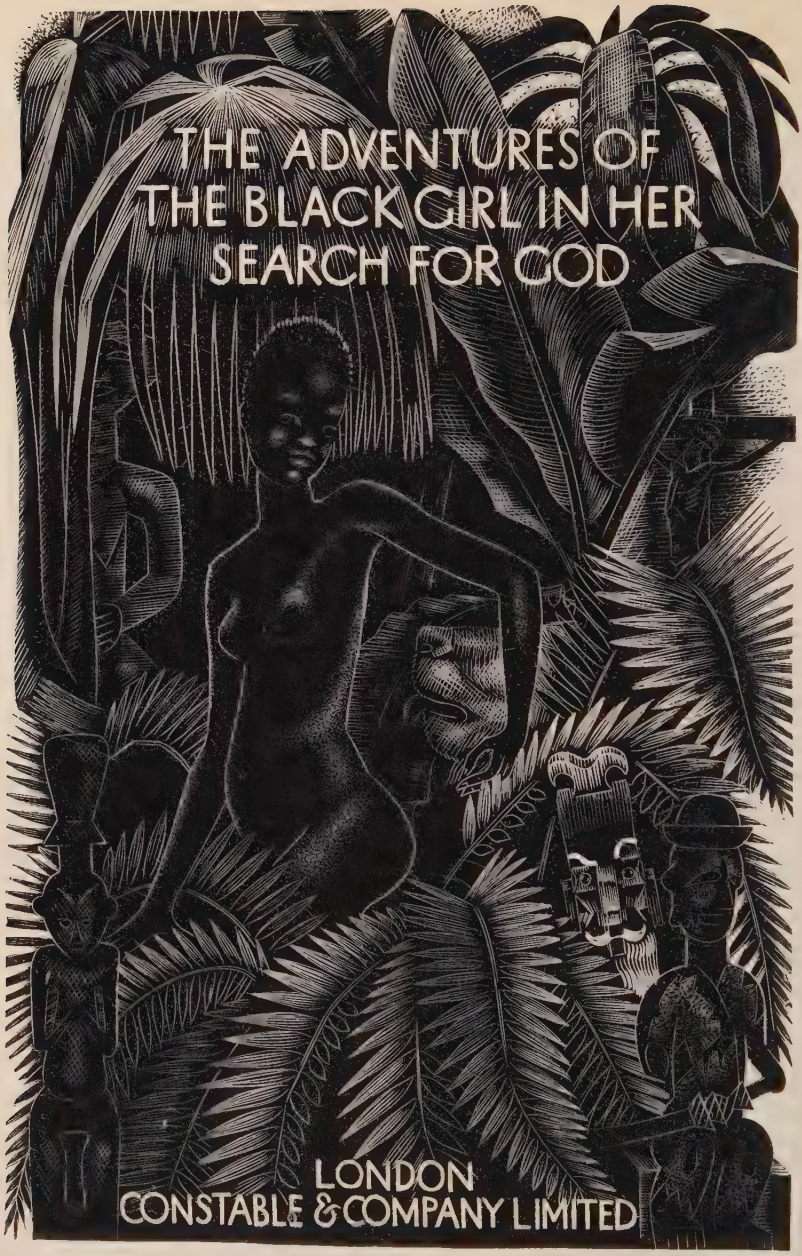
58. *Shaw at Rehearsal* by Bernard Partridge

59. J. M. Synge by John Yeats



60. Virginia Woolf
by Francis Dodd

61. James Joyce by
J. E. Blanche



62. Title-page by John Farleigh for Shaw's *Black Girl*

body of readers, though his masterpieces were of earlier date. The success of *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) was due to extra-literary causes, for the story of Diana Warwick was hastily assumed to be based upon that of Caroline Norton (a granddaughter of Sheridan the playwright) who had some time before been suspected of selling a political secret. Apart from this unsought *succès du scandale* Meredith's popularity has never been more than moderate and, such as it is, it is for the most part due to intellectual respect rather than to any warmer feeling. The mood of his novels is poetic, their spirit critical. Although the Victorians read poetry as well as novels and both with avidity, although they were familiar with and not averse to novels in verse form (e.g. Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh*), they did not take to Meredith's pioneering innovations in the novel—his lyricism, his elusive and allusive style, his implicit criticism of current standards in personal relationships. Other novelists of the period were strongly critical of this and that, Dickens continuously so; but their books were rich in incident and they afforded their readers the luxury of moral indignation.

In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* the parent-son relationship came under fire. The failure of Sir Austin Feverel's morally protective educational system for Richard touched mid-Victorian readers at a sensitive spot, since it sowed doubts concerning paternal wisdom, the key factor in the cherished unity of family life; and the tragic end of the novel is free from the cushioning sentiment which in the typical novels of the age made death a not too discomfiting spectacle. But while Meredith was capable of tragedy, his more important contribution to the development of the novel lay in his aptitude for high comedy.

He was born in Portsmouth, where his grandfather, Melchizedek Meredith, was a flourishing tailor and naval outfitter. The snobberies of family desire to escape the associations of trade provide the central theme of *Evan Harrington* (1861), where Meredith's grandfather is the model for Evan's father 'the great Mel' (Melchizedek Harrington). Here and in *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871) the humour is richer than in the mordant comedy of *The Egoist* (1879), Meredith's finest work. In the character of the egoistical Sir Willoughby Patterne he created a universal figure ('Willoughby Patterne',

said Robert Louis Stevenson, 'is all of us'), the elegantly strutting, all-demanding, blindly unselfcritical male who is civilized society's petted yet unadmirable product. Clara Middleton, the foil to Willoughby, is Meredith's most enchanting heroine. Vernon Whitford, whom Clara ultimately marries, is a partial portrait of Leslie Stephen (Virginia Woolf's scholarly father), as Dr. Middleton the lover of good wine is of Meredith's father-in-law T. L. Peacock. The lyrical and idyllic quality of Meredith's prose, first evident in *Richard Feverel*, runs through much of *The Egoist* as a light and subtle music—in dialogue, in descriptions of characters, even of their clothes, as well as more patently in the nature passages:

> The desire for the happiness of Willoughby was fervent on his behalf, and wafted [Clara] far from friends and letters to a narrow Tyrolean valley, where a shallow river ran, with the indentations of a remotely-seen army of winding ranks in column, topaz over the pebbles, to hollows of ravishing emerald. There sat Liberty, after her fearful leap over the prison-wall, at peace to watch the water and the falls of sunshine on the mountain above, between descending pine-stem shadows. (Ch. XIII.)

The Egoist is not an easy novel, but it is an exceptionally rewarding one that yields increasing delight at each re-reading. Only in repeated re-reading, indeed, do its wisdom and understanding, its irony and beauty, become fully apparent, for there can be no doubt that Meredith's mannerisms of style are a forbidding initial obstacle. These are, however, the essential medium of communication of the unique taste and flavour of his novels, which declined in quality and interest after *The Egoist*. Only passing mention can be made of two of his political novels, *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) and *The Tragic Comedians* (1880), and of the 1877 lecture on *The Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* (published in 1897 as *An Essay on Comedy*) which is indispensable for an understanding of the comic element in his novels and of his deep concern for the social emancipation of women.

Meredith's poetry has unaccountably passed into shadow, from which it must sooner or later emerge for good. *Modern Love*, referred to in an earlier chapter (XVII), is one of the few great tragic poems in English; 'Love in the Valley' is among the most beautiful lyrics; 'Lucifer in Starlight' and 'The Woods of

Westermain' are more metaphysical; 'Juggling Jerry' is an affecting dramatic monologue in rhyming verse.

The intellectualizing and civilizing process which the novel underwent in Meredith's hands was carried further—and, conceivably, too far—by Henry James (1843–1916). As the son of an American Swedenborgian theologian and the younger brother of the philosopher and psychologist William James, he was brought up in an atmosphere of metaphysical investigation which, with differences and additions from his own subtle mind, set the tone of the novels that were to have a profound influence upon the following generations of English and American writers. Having received a varied education in New York (where he was born), England, France, and Switzerland, Henry James then studied law at Harvard, but migrated to Europe in his early thirties and spent most of the remainder of his life in England, adopting British citizenship in 1915. Yet, though he lived so long in England, he never became a 'naturalized Englishman' in any other than the officially certificated sense. In the nature of his work he was always a foreign novelist using by accident of birth the English language. He was closer to Turgenev and Flaubert than to any English novelist: to the former in human analysis, to the latter in the particularity of his care for literary style. Moreover, through his American forebears he inherited a characteristic tenderness of conscience, modified by his own exquisitely sensitive response to the nuances of social propriety and æsthetic deliberation. Inasmuch as the natural genius of the English novel inclines mostly towards robust improvisation, the lure of James's very different methods wrenched subsequent English novelists from the traditional path, and no one but Joseph Conrad—himself a Slav, with a wealth of vigorous material to give body to his work—has so far succeeded in adapting the Jamesian pattern of psychological analysis and æsthetic care to the purposes of independent creation. The fine-drawn quality of James's writing, his appearance of making very much of very little, has misled his English imitators into the false assumption that something may be made of nothing, that novels can be all manner and no matter. Tenuous though his material may seem to be, there is often a wealth of it, however much it may become enmeshed in a

verbal web. In his ceaseless desire for clarity—the desire grew upon him after he had written the masterpiece of his first period, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881)—James plunged into obscurity through an acquired habit of minute qualification of statement in which the drift of his sentences is often lost. The necessary equipment for reading Henry James is an alert, critical, and sceptical mind, a mind capable of threading its way unbemused through the mazes of his prose, a mind resistant to the vaporizing effect of his finicking epicene sensitivity and niceness. Like all who are subject to the rule of sensibility James was acutely responsive to horror and fascinated by it. Even those who doubt that social perturbations merit the genius he largely expended on them, have no doubt that in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), one of his many short tales, he created an unsurpassed ghost story. There, his remarkable power of evocation is used with subtle mastery to induce a sensation of moral malignity and spiritual disturbance, which is made the more terrifying by James's reliance upon elusive suggestion to indicate the presence of demonic soul-destroying forces.

James tried without success to write for the stage, though since his death others have adapted his novels and stories most acceptably as plays: e.g. *The Heiress*, from *Washington Square* (1881), and *The Innocents*, from *The Turn of the Screw*. He wrote much, and any choice from his total works must be guided by personal inclination. The following are representative: *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *Daisy Miller* (1879), *Princess Casamassima* (1886), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Golden Bowl* (1905).

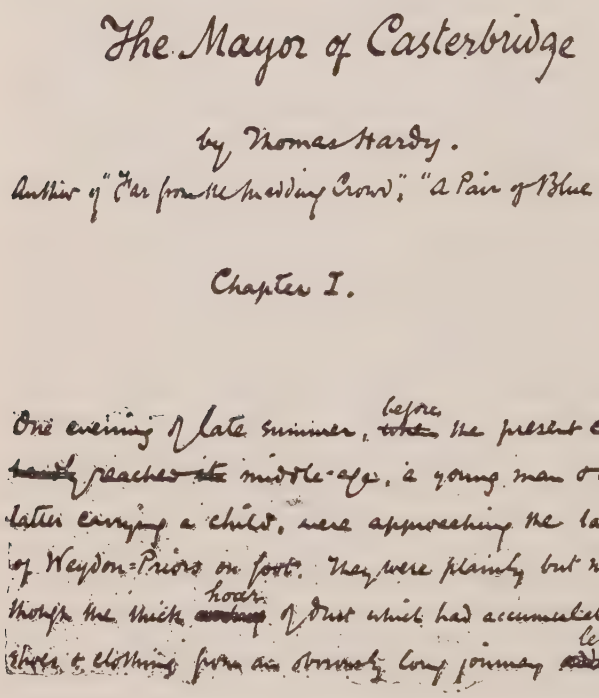
Thomas Hardy

The old Saxon kingdom of Wessex was no more to modern readers than a region of south-west England mentioned in text books and shown on historical maps, until Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) took it as the scene of his novels and poems written from the 1860s onward until very shortly before his death more than half a century later. His use of the name Wessex, rather than of the individual counties comprising it (with Dorset as its main part), was not an antiquarian affectation. Hardy was born and had his ancestral roots in Wessex (his birth-place was Higher Bockhampton, Dorset), and his faith

was in the solidities and values of the past. He mistrusted the frailer yet more aggressive ideals of contemporary life; modern industrialism showed up badly beside the pastoral and agricultural life of his own people; modern education was, to him, little better than a thin glossy coating upon a multitude of shabby minds and paltry souls. That he was a pessimist became the parrot-cry of critics and detractors. It is nearer to the truth to say that he was a realist: in an early poem ('In Tenebris') he was already declaring that 'If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst'. While he did not turn his back upon the present, he judged it and found it wanting, assessing not as a social reformer but as a valuer of minds and spirits, of what men and women *are* as shown in their conduct of life. In his vision of it Wessex was both an entity, a self-existing living Thing, and a testing ground of its human kind. He was at variance with Victorian moral standards without being in any sense a moral rebel. Still less was he an immoralist as he was labelled on account of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the reception of which led him to turn away from novels and return to poetry, in which from 1898 he found a new audience. Tess was, as the sub-title of the story describes her, 'a pure woman', though as the mother of an illegitimate child and a (however involuntary) murderess she was, in the eyes of Victorian readers, a criminal in the worst degree. To Hardy what she was by nature and true intent was the only valid test; to others, what she did was alone significant.

Hardy, like Meredith, was a poet throughout his novels, though in both prose and verse he was less poetical than Meredith. It was in the twofold quality of his vision, far more than in separable passages of writing, that the poet in Hardy appears. His vision was at once epical and lyrical. It encompassed the wildness of Egdon Heath (see chapter I in *The Return of the Native*, 1878) and the richness of Blackmoor Vale (*Tess*) and took in everything between, down to the dust thrown upon the hedgerow boughs by passing carts (see the opening pages of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 1886). On balance, however, it was the epic aspect that predominated. Most of his lyrics have more of a miniature epic quality than of songfulness. Considered as a whole Hardy's lyrics are probably the most unlyrical in English poetry, not only because of the angularity of his language but

also because they spring frequently from grim eternal things filtered down to human souls. When G. K. Chesterton made the foolish observation[1] that Hardy was like a village atheist brooding over the village idiot he should have recognized instead that Hardy brooded over the wide universe, finding no comfort in the easy beliefs of other men. *The Dynasts* (1904–8), his vast


The Mayor of Casterbridge

by Thomas Hardy.

Author of "Far from the madding Crowd", "A Pair of Blue Eyes", &c.

Chapter I.

One evening of late summer, before the present century had reached its middle-age, a young man & woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors on foot. They were plainly but not ill clad, though the thick hoar of dust which had accumulated on their shoes & clothing from an obviously long journey lent a disadvantageous shabbiness

'epic drama' of the Napoleonic wars, ranges not merely over the earthly events of ten years but through its supernatural Intelligences delves also into the riddles of Life and Death.

If, however, these sombre preoccupations had exhausted the sum of his genius Hardy would have been a lesser writer. The Human Comedy as well as the Human Tragedy was focused in his embracing vision—not the air-spun comedy which mainly engaged Meredith, but the earthy comedy through which

[1] In *The Victorian Age in Literature* (Home University Library, 1913).

Hardy reached back to the humour of Shakespeare and Chaucer.

Pessimism and Realism

Few, if any, have failed by so narrow a margin to achieve greatness in literature as George Gissing (1857–1903) was fated to do. His failure was nevertheless of a catastrophic kind, for his near-excellence as a writer was nullified by fundamental flaws of character. The title of his best and partly autobiographical novel, *Born in Exile* (1892), is a clue to his own lifelong sense of estrangement by circumstances from the intellectual and social environment for which he was fitted, but he was himself the agent of his own exile, through his incapacity for the orderly management of life. He experienced much hardship and poverty, reflected in *The Unclassed* (1884), *Demos* (1886), *New Grub Street* (1891), and with a less pessimistic colouring in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) which is largely an account of passages in Gissing's own life, written after his miseries had been alleviated. He was an acute student of Dickens, upon whom he wrote what is still one of the best critical studies (*Charles Dickens*, 1898). The fatal handicap to all Gissing's novels was his attitude of defeat by life, which laid upon him a mental and spiritual burden which his literary gifts were powerless to lift above the gulf of dejection.

The Realistic Movement in modern English fiction is commonly dated from 1894 when *Esther Waters* by George Moore (1852–1933) appeared. The heroine goes from a strict religious upbringing into domestic service with a family in Ireland, where the whole household gambles on horses. Esther is seduced and the author thereafter steers her through the trials and distresses of unblessed motherhood and its aftermath of struggle towards rehabilitation. With its accumulation of realistic detail of the social underworld *Esther Waters* became a pattern book for a new trend in English fiction, which derived at a remove from Émile Zola, by whose unflinching novels George Moore was temporarily influenced while living as a young man in France. Notwithstanding its realism of detail *Esther Waters* is written in a lush prose, at the opposite extreme from the ascetic style adopted in Moore's final phase.[1]

[1] See below, pp. 280–1.

Realistic novels and stories of slum life were written by Richard Whiteing (1840–1928), *No. 5 John Street* (1899), by Arthur Morrison (1863–1945), *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), *A Child of the Jago* (1896), and by others before realism took another turn in the work of Arnold Bennett.[1]

Though they are neither realistic in the present sense nor fairly to be described as pessimistic, a certain greyness of tone and seriousness of mood may justify the inclusion here of *John Inglesant* (1880) by J. H. Shorthouse (1834–1903), a religious historical novel of the seventeenth century based (without admission by the author) on works of the period; and of the novels of 'Mark Rutherford' (William Hale White, 1831–1913) —*The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881) and other admirably written short novels of self-examination and religious experience in a dissenting environment. The books by both these authors have a distinguished minor position in English literature, but are more often praised by critics and historians than opened by other readers.

Pessimism in verse reached its culmination in *The City of Dreadful Night* (published serially in 1874; in volume form with other poems, 1880) by James Thomson (B.V.)[2] (1834–82), a freethinker whose personal miseries were increased by drunkenness. His chief poem is the gloomy but powerful testament of an atheist, ending

> The moving moon and stars from east to west
> Circle before her in the sea of air;
> Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
> Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
> The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
> The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
> And confirmation of the old despair.

The Æsthetic Movement

The phrase 'Art for art's sake' appeared in Walter Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*[3] and provoked controversy to the end of the century and beyond. It was taken as the watchword of the Æsthetic Movement with which the names of

[1] See below, p. 282.

[2] Thomson used these initials of his pen-name, Bysshe Vanolis, to distinguish him from the eighteenth-century poet.

[3] See above, pp. 241–2.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) and the American painter J. M. Whistler (1834–1903) have become most closely associated, though it is impossible to separate from it a stream of influence deriving from the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, of whom William Morris (1834–96) was at least a half-brother. While as a poet and as a writer of Utopian tales nostalgic for the Middle Ages Morris's reputation has dwindled near to vanishing point, his work as a craftsman in the applied and decorative arts, especially printing and book production, has been of lasting value, if to some extent as a point of departure. Morris's designs were complex and elaborate in fabrics, wallpapers, and book illustration: and despite his socialist fervour it was the well-to-do who were served by the expensive products of his hand-crafts. His passion for good design stirred his successors to apply similar basic ideals to simplified patterns and forms, however, and to machine-made articles. Whether Morris would or would not think well of a present-day Penguin book cannot be guessed. That he would have no inkling of its descent from his own Kelmscott *Chaucer* is certain. Nevertheless the line of descent is there, through the application of conscientious principles of design to inexpensive mass-produced books. The machine has been vindicated against Morris's contempt if not against Samuel Butler's prophetic dread.

Whistler's contribution to literature was the 'Ten O'Clock' lecture he delivered at Oxford and Cambridge in 1885 and included in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), an excellently produced book devoted mainly to his libel action against Ruskin, which won him a farthing damages and impoverished him for costs. In the 'Ten O'Clock' he enlarged upon his favourite theme that the true artist does 'not confine himself to purposeless copying of Nature' but 'is born to pick, and choose, and group . . . as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony. To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano.' To the Æsthetic Movement in general Whistler contributed a love of simple forms, an understanding of the value of space, and, thus, a preparedness to dispense with elaborate decoration and ornamental clutter. Morris redecorated the Victorian drawing-room; Whistler turned it inside out.

Oscar Wilde hardly affected the Æsthetic Movement, except in such extravagances of person and behaviour as Robert Hichens satirized in *The Green Carnation* (1894); but Wilde was himself affected by it. He addressed himself devoutly to the æsthetics of writing, in his fairy tales and in the essays gathered in *Intentions* (1891), 'The Decay of Lying', 'Pen, Pencil, and Poison', 'The Truth of Masks', and the dialogue between Gilbert and Ernest which embodies Wilde's creed of art and life. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is a studied performance in prose as well as a self-consciously 'wicked' and fundamentally silly novel; and his prison document *De Profundis* (1905; complete edn. 1949), for all its sincerity, is equally lacking in literary spontaneity.

Pater in the essay 'On Style' included in *Appreciations* (1889) had commended an economical manner of writing ruled by the determination to admit no 'surplusage':

> Surplusage! [the writer] will dread that, as the runner on his muscles. For in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage, from the last finish of the gem engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust, back to the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo's fancy, in the rough hewn block of stone.

His own practice did not always fit the theory, though in his chief creative work, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), the style was more austere than opulent. Opulence was a joy to Wilde, the opulence of jewels, of perfumes, and of exotic dyes. Pater's 'no surplusage' was not taken to heart until in the next century writers became too eager to unpack their prose. In so far as Pater meant no clutter, no orotundity, he was right; but if by no surplusage he meant that writing should be cut to the bone, he forgot the generosity of abundant Nature, as well as the practice of most writers of English who had much to say. He was much impressed by Flaubert's laborious search for the inevitable word—the one only right word for the one particular place and moment—but inevitability should surely imply spontaneity also, a quality rare in Pater.

The New Romantics

While realism was stalking the hospital, the workhouse, and the slums, romance was still alive. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94)

Illustration by Aubrey Beardsley from Oscar Wilde's *Salome*

was a living as well as a writing romantic from the days when he loped through Edinburgh as a gaunt young man in a velveteen jacket to the final years when he lived as Tusitala on Samoa in the Pacific seas. His besetting illness, his long fight against the creeping shadow of death, became a personal romance: a painful romance to himself, an heroic romance to his friends and admirers. His travel books—*An Inland Voyage* (1878), *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879), *Across the Plains* (1892), and others; his essays—*Virginibus Puerisque* (1881) and *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (1882); and his short stories—*The Merry Men* (1887), etc.—all these had their large audience, and their form and compactness suited the limited scope of his individual talent, for he had little sustained creative ability. But if he often laboured at composition he could disguise the labour in the finished work. Though he ran aground halfway through *Treasure Island* (1883), no book could seem more spontaneous, as none in its kind—if indeed it is not a kind in itself—is more deserving of its immediate popularity and lasting fame. *The New Arabian Nights* (1822) have the glitter and glamour of romance at the highest pitch of credible improbability, for they compel the reader (how willingly!) to believe in the unbelievable. *Kidnapped* (1886) seems hardly what it once was, though boys may still follow David Balfour and Alan Breck breathlessly on their long and perilous escape. *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) has worn better, and a few of the poems (upon which he disproportionately prided himself) are remembered. *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885) still has its proper nursery audience. Stevenson's unfinished novel *Weir of Hermiston* (published 1896) is a tantalizing fragment. Even in the limited distance it goes it suggests that in tragic emotional power and in the characterization of Hermiston the inflexible judge, Kirstie, and Christina, Stevenson would here have outsoared all that he had written before. If everything else that Stevenson wrote should be forgotten by some date in the future, he would leave the phrase 'Jekyll and Hyde' as his memorial in daily speech. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) has the rare quality in a parable of good and evil of being an exciting story; and for psychologists it has become a case-book study.

Andrew Lang (1844–1912), Austin Dobson (1840–1921), and

Edmund Gosse (1849–1928) wrote slight but pleasing poems, romantic in sentiment and neat in structure, using French fixed verse-forms—the ballade, rondeau, villanelle, etc. Dobson also wrote graceful essays on eighteenth-century themes of the sedan-chair and powder-and-patches sort; but Gosse turned aside to commend Ibsen to the English public, to write on Swinburne, and to produce one great book, *Father and Son* (1907).

Popular romantic novels of more than passing attraction were written by Rider Haggard (1856–1925)—*King Solomon's Mines* (1886) and others; and by Anthony Hope (Anthony Hope Hawkins, 1863–1933), whose *Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) added the word Ruritania to the language. Even more popular, Hall Caine (1853–1931), who began uncharacteristically with *Recollections of D. G. Rossetti* (1882), and Marie Corelli (1854–1924) belong not so much to a history of literature as to an inquiry into the relationship between best-sellers and megalomania in authors.

Fin-de-siècle

It would be neglectful to end a commentary on the last decade of the nineteenth century without introducing the cliché which heads this section. Used as a literary label it covered so many diverse writers, artists, and works as to be as meaningless as any label could be, though it is commonly attached to those known as the decadents: Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, John Davidson, Lionel Johnson, among others. Two magazines, *The Yellow Book* (1894–7) and *The Savoy* (1896), provided the chief platforms for the decadents, though the former had among its contributors many staid writers who were to become classics in the next decade.

The 1890s produced, also, sober novels by Mrs. Humphry Ward (1851–1920), following upon her most acclaimed *Robert Elsmere* (1888); reticent poems and essays by Alice Meynell (1847–1922); the poems of Francis Thompson (1859–1907), including the splendid and profoundly religious 'The Hound of Heaven' (1893); much of the best work of Kipling and the early Yeats; the beginnings of Bernard Shaw, Conrad, H. G. Wells, Hilaire Belloc, J. M. Barrie. Most of these matured and flourished in the next century and are discussed in the following chapters. An undertaking with no direct place in literature,

but foreshadowing a major change in the outlook of novelists and others, was Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (6 vols. 1897–1910), a banned book which nevertheless did its work.

The century ended in a minor key. The triumphant Imperialism of which Kipling and in a lesser degree W. E. Henley were the celebrants suffered a shock—a mortal shock though this was not then apparent—in the series of defeats inflicted by the Boers in the South African War of 1899–1902. Under the shadow of that war and the approaching end of Queen Victoria the new century began. Kipling had not been as blatant an Imperialist as his political opponents declared. His pride was tempered by the idea of service, even though those served might be 'lesser breeds without the law'. And it was Kipling who, at the moment when the Empire seemed to reach its peak of majesty and glory at the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen in 1897, raised his voice in 'Recessional' to pray: 'For frantic boast and foolish word, Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord!'

CHAPTER XX

POST-VICTORIAN VERSE AND PROSE

Ten years after the Victorian Age ended, the younger writers dedicated their anthology *Georgian Poetry 1911–12* to Thomas Hardy as 'the greatest of the moderns'. Hardy, who had published his first book forty years before, was then over seventy. In 1913 Robert Bridges, aged sixty-nine, was appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Alfred Austin (1835–1913), whose twenty or so volumes of verse contain not even one good poem. The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth were linked both by the older writers, such as Hardy and Bridges who had already done much but were still to do impressive work, and by a group of younger men—Shaw, George Moore, Kipling, Yeats, Wells, Conrad, and others—who began as late Victorians but were to be of more account in the next generation.

Poetry

Hardy brought out *Wessex Poems* in 1898 many years after some of them were written, and this volume was followed, up to the time of his death, by some half-dozen further collections of lyrics, mostly written in a verbally granitic style appropriate to Hardy's burdened view of life. His greatest work in verse, perhaps the greatest of all his writings, *The Dynasts*, appeared in three parts (1904, 1906, 1908), winning respect and admiration from many who had failed to recognize in his novels the hand of a master. In a few poems—e.g. 'The Oxen', 'In Time of "the Breaking of Nations" ', 'Weathers'—Hardy showed a more melodious lyrical gift than he usually cared to exercise.

Hardy's roots were in the ancient earth of Wessex. Robert Bridges (1844–1930) also looked backward, but to a cultural past of literature and scholarship. He was a classicist in form,

a romantic in feeling, admiring the restraint of the Greeks but also the music and colour of Keats. His own poetry, though not deficient in emotion, has an unruffled surface and a muted tone. The poetic dramas (*Nero*, 1885, and others up to *The Feast of Bacchus*, 1893) failed to come to life, for Bridges had even less dramatic sense than other nineteenth-century poets who attempted drama. But the long poems *The Growth of Love* (1876, enlarged 1889) and *Eros and Psyche* (1885, revised 1894), and many short lyrics published between 1873 and 1925, give him a higher place in English poetry than a violent change of temper qualified the next generation to recognize. In 1929, at the age of eighty-five, Bridges produced his most ambitious work, *The Testament of Beauty*, a philosophical poem of some 4,000 lines in 'loose alexandrines' (the outcome of his long interest in classical metres) and modified spelling. *The Testament of Beauty*, though by no means an easy poem, had a larger circulation than any work in verse since Tennyson died in 1892, and it was confidently praised as being in the front rank of poetry, a judgment questioned by later opinion. Beauty is hardly the main subject of the poem, which is as much concerned with Instinct, Reason, Belief, Ethic, and other abstractions, and with certain practical matters bearing on the state of the contemporary world as seen through the eyes of one who was a contemplative Oxford recluse.

A. E. Housman (1859–1936) had published a small book of short poems, *A Shropshire Lad*, in 1896 and published no more until 1922, *Last Poems*. He spent his life as a Latin scholar, but his poems do not, except in their stoicism and economy of expression, reflect that side of his life. They are much preoccupied with young men who went a-soldiering, and death and the grave or the gallows are always close at hand. The personal problem in Housman has yet to be fully explored. As a poet he was a little master, but hardly more; and no habit of extravagant praise can hide the monotonous morbidity which runs through his verse. At his best he pictured the beauty of nature with a remarkable avoidance of decorative epithets. The undismayed facing of life's calamities and injustices which sets the mood of nearly all Housman's poems is sustained too long and to the point at which it begins to seem less a display of

stoical fortitude than the inverted sentimentality of a stiff-lipped English gentleman.

The titles of the books published by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) before the close of the old century indicate the character of his early interests and inclinations, which were greatly modified and in important respects reversed in his late forties. *Fairy and Folk Tales* (1888), *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), *The Secret Rose* (1897), *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), *The Shadowy Waters* (1900) show his attachment at that time to the myths and legends of the romantic Ireland he was afterwards to declare 'dead and gone',[1] and to borrowed doctrines which led him to delve into Eastern mysticism and to become for a while an 'esoteric Buddhist'. A further influence was that of the French symbolists (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, and others) and their English disciples, such as Arthur Symons,[2] who valued suggestion above direct statement. Yeats was also strongly affected by Pater and by Blake (whose poems he was one of the first to revive through the edition he prepared in collaboration with E. J. Ellis in 1893). He eventually sloughed off the æstheticism of Pater, but the metaphysical elements in Blake and the symbolism of that English poet (more deeply rooted there than in the later and more self-conscious French school) continued to work to the end in Yeats's poetry.

Until about 1912 he repeatedly explored the vein that made him acceptable to the many who found in the tunefulness, the romantic pensiveness and gentle melancholy, the homely nature imagery, the dreams, the simple ballads, and the old stories which constituted the spirit and substance of Yeats's verse, a pleasing and unexacting literary exercise. In *Crossways* (1889) there were such still-popular pieces as 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', 'The Falling of the Leaves', 'The Stolen Child', 'Down by the Sally Gardens'; in *The Rose* (1893) 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', 'When You are Old', 'The Ballad of Father Gilligan'; in *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899) 'The Song of Wandering Aengus', 'The Cap and Bells', 'He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', 'The Fiddler of Dooney'. Nothing equally

[1] In the poem 'September 1913' included in *Responsibilities* (1914).
[2] See Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899).

'memorable' in the popular sense is to be found in either *In the Seven Woods* (1903) or *The Green Helmet* (1910). Though in the latter he still referred to 'a written speech Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease' as 'gradual Time's last gift',[1] he nevertheless records a change in his own attitude to verse:

> When I was young,
> I had not given a penny for a song
> Did not the poet sing it with such airs
> That one believed he had a sword upstairs;
> Yet would be now, could I but have my wish,
> Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish.[2]

Romantic and heroic poetry, suggestive of the age of the sword (even if the sword were kept upstairs) had ceased to stir him at a time when 'All things can tempt me from this craft of verse'.

In *Responsibilities* (1914) appeared two poems that were crucial in Yeats's development: the 'September 1913', already referred to, with its refrain to the several stanzas:

> Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
> It's with O'Leary in the grave.

and the last-but-one poem in the volume, 'A Coat':

> I made my song a coat
> Covered with embroideries
> Out of old mythologies
> From heel to throat;
> But the fools caught it,
> Wore it in the world's eyes
> As though they'd wrought it.
> Song, let them take it,
> For there's more enterprise
> In walking naked.

This deliberate shedding by Yeats of the embroidered coat of verse is particularly important in its chronological place, for as a manifesto of the new technique which was to dominate English poetry for at least a whole generation it precedes T. S. Eliot's first volume *Prufrock and other Observations* (1917) and the first publication of Gerard Manley Hopkins's *Poems* (1918),

[1] In 'Upon a House shaken by the Land Agitation'.

[2] 'All Things can Tempt Me.' This and the following quotations are from *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Macmillan, London, 1950).

Hopkins and Eliot being frequently regarded as the originators of the modernist school. From that point Yeats's verse grew more 'difficult', compact and bare, in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair* (1933), *A Full Moon in March* (1935), and *Last Poems* (1936–9). As a young man he was strongly antagonistic to the introduction of contemporary affairs into poetry, but by the date of the 1921 volume he had found it impossible to remain as a poet detached from the events of the 1916 Easter rebellion and after (see 'Easter 1916', etc.).

In his age (from *c.* 1925, when he was sixty) he was tormented by the inability of his body to keep pace with his mind and desires. 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'The Tower' (both in the 1928 volume) touch upon this theme. In the former he cries to the sages of 'the holy city of Byzantium'

> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.

in the latter:

> What shall I do with this absurdity—
> O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail?
> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination. . . .

In one of the poems of his last year, 'Politics', he answered the German novelist Thomas Mann's assertion that 'in our time the destiny of man presents itself in political terms' by asking

> How can I, that girl standing there,
> My attention fix
> On Roman or on Russian
> Or on Spanish politics?

Just as 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' is accepted as the set piece of the younger Yeats, so also is 'Byzantium' (in the 1933 volume) of the later anti-Romantic Yeats. It is characteristic of the period into which he lived and which received him, ageing

though he was, as a herald of the new evangel of poetry, that the simple naturalness of an Irish lake should be rejected and the formal artifice of Byzantine mosaics be embraced; and it is not improbable that the contemporary attraction of 'Byzantium' lay in its apparent difficulty, though the difficulty is almost completely removed if the poem is read to the accompaniment of a visual memory of the hieratic art it celebrates.

Yeats's practical contribution to the modern Irish theatre is mentioned in the next chapter. He sought to make plays out of words alone, ignoring or even repudiating the importance of character.

'. . . people are exasperated by poetry which they do not understand, and contemptuous of poetry which they understand without effort.' 'We have to defend Kipling against the charge of excessive lucidity.'[1] Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) was an uncrowned ideal Poet Laureate. He could write for any national occasion and for any occasion of national concern, not perfunctorily or as 'a job' but because he was profoundly stirred by such events and could immerse himself in them as other poets immerse themselves in eternal issues. Eternity for Kipling was not outside Time, but was a linked background to Time; and Time was for him the Moment enlarged. To his intellectualist critics it seemed that most of Kipling's poetry was about trivial or ephemeral things, and that he had the vices of superficiality and obviousness. But these things may also be seen in a reverse aspect: even in an aspect which raises Kipling's trivialities and ephemeralities, superficialities and obviousnesses, to the status of Blake's

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour.[2]

While Kipling, being in all that he undertook a craftsman of genius, appeared to lack that largeness and penetration of vision which is accepted as the hallmark of genius, it may well be that by sheer mastery of his material and utter competence

[1] These quotations are from *A Choice of Kipling's Verse made by T. S. Eliot, with an essay on Rudyard Kipling* (1941).

[2] *Auguries of Innocence.*

and ease in handling it he made the material and his own accomplishment seem less important than they were. Why need it be assumed that to write about enlisted soldiers in language that enlisted soldiers as well as others can understand is a lower achievement than to write about the highbred in language that is largely exclusive? If in early years Kipling often seemed to be writing-down, at least he was a great leveller in literature, and his failures might more aptly be found among his few abstruse stories and verses than in the *Departmental Ditties* (1886) and *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), even though these are less attractive to the intellectual palate. His later poems were interspersed and welded with his prose stories, and belong essentially to them.

Enough has been said in the paragraphs on Yeats, above, concerning the change of mood and technique in poetry to make it unnecessary here to enlarge upon the curious case of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89), who remained unpublished in his own lifetime and exercised what at present seems an unparalleled influence after his *Poems* were first issued in 1918. A critical literature to which his fellow Catholics have contributed with enthusiasm and attentive study has already accumulated around his work, and that he is among the greatest poets has become an article of literary faith for innumerable Catholics and non-Catholics alike. In what degree these estimates of his importance will be confirmed by less-engaged observers in the future cannot be assessed. On publication his poems merged with immediate conformity into a stream of tendency already aflow; his 'sprung rhythm' and 'inscape'[1] were propagated at a moment when technical innovation and complex presentation seemed to young poets to provide the only road out of the treadmill of smooth and conventional again-saying. In these respects they at one and the same time followed and led the age in which they were launched. The 'new' poetry would not have been less new if Yeats and Eliot had been its leaders unaided by Hopkins; but without Hopkins there would have been a clearer line of metrical progression.

[1] The meaning of these terms must be sought in Hopkins's own detailed explication in his published *Letters* and *Notebooks*, or (more conveniently) in *A Hopkins Reader*, edited by John Pick (Oxford University Press, 1953).

For good or bad, his importance lies in the attraction exercised by his intricate and subtle mind upon those who were drawn to intricacy and subtlety, often without possessing the mental equipment requisite to keep pretentiousness in check.

Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), whose *1914 and other Poems* (1915) made him a popular and extensively acclaimed poet during World War I, was decried by writers in the next generation who found in his romantico-heroic bearing towards war a 'falsification' of life, though it might be claimed that a similar charge could be brought against all heroic poetry, including the great epics, and against certain later poems by Yeats which the anti-Brooke critics approve: e.g. 'Easter 1916' with its refrain 'A terrible beauty is born'. Wilfrid Owen (1893–1918), who took a different view of war and was less facile in technique than Brooke, left only a few poems, of which 'Strange Meeting' (*Poems*, 1920) is best known.

Fiction

Apart from Conrad, the novelists of the first half of the twentieth century appeared from the angle of the mid-century to present no certain candidate for immortality, though Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy seemed in their lifetime to be in the front rank, and a decade or so later James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were considered to be so. None of these can yet be seen in perspective and no more than tentative comment upon them can be made.

Joseph Conrad—Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowsky (1857–1924)—born and bred in Poland, conceived in childhood a passion for the sea, upon which his eyes had not then been even passingly set. By persistence and against the urging of his landed family he became a merchant sailor and in due course a fully certificated master on British ships sailing to Africa and the Pacific, voyages which gave him material subsequently used in novels and short stories. Between 1878 (when he first saw England and knew little or nothing of its native tongue) and 1895 (when his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, was published) he acquired that mastery of English which was to make him

perhaps the most admirable stylist of his generation. If he never quite used the language with an Englishman's unpremeditated ease, he nevertheless used it with greater distinction than most English writers could have brought to bear upon material as full and rich as his. Conrad's prose was distinguished (an indefinable but immediately recognizable quality) without being precious, for he had much to write about, not simply a passion for writing. Moreover, he had—if not a philosophy of life within the academic philosopher's meaning—a governing idea which gave coherence and consistency to his books and made him the only contemporary novelist whose works include nothing that can be rejected without some loss to the whole. In the preface to *A Personal Record* (1912) he wrote: 'Those who read me, know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity.' This governing idea of fidelity, of faith-keeping between man and man, is the mainspring of his greatest novels, of *Lord Jim* (1900) in chief, which has the excitement of an adventure story, the interest of a psychological study, and the dignity of tragedy. Although Conrad admired Henry James and his care for definition and exactitude, he did not succumb to James's involution of style. He sought painstakingly for simple clarity of statement, and if in narrative method he set up his own system of involvement it demands from the reader only patient attention, not the capacity for threading a maze. Like Browning, Conrad strove to see his characters and their problems from more than a single viewpoint, knowing that one man's evidence is untrustworthy, however honest in intention. He therefore employed in several of his novels and stories the character named Marlow as a multi-lensed mirror to gather and reflect evidence from various sources, with the purpose of reaching truth undistorted. But while this genuineness of purpose gives to Conrad's novels a solid metaphysical permanence infrequent in English fiction, it does not outweigh their attraction as stories. He was a full man as a teller of tales, and a certain exoticism of style and atmosphere produces the quality of luminosity which is peculiar to Conrad's prose. As already suggested, it is no easy matter to pick and choose among his books, but of the novels after *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo* (1904), *The*

Secret Agent (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), *Chance* (1914), and *Victory* (1915) may be mentioned without disrespect to the others; *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), *Youth* (1902), and *Typhoon* (1903) among the shorter books; and *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906) among the autobiographical writings.

Between *Esther Waters*[1] (1894) and *The Brook Kerith* (1916), in which a new personal style was matured, George Moore published several volumes of fiction that made no deep impression and a three-volume autobiography, *Hail and Farewell* ('Ave', 1911; 'Salve', 1912; 'Vale', 1914), marked by numerous designed indiscretions concerning, largely, his Irish friends and acquaintances in the literary movement, including Yeats, who delivered some delayed counter-blows in *Dramatis Personæ* (1935).[2] But although it was the gossiping aspect that brought it into immediate prominence, there was never a doubt among judicious readers that in *Hail and Farewell* Moore had composed an autobiographical masterpiece: in lucidity of expression and freshness of style it is a fine piece of literature; in openness of statement and assertion an illuminating personal and impersonal record; in its cheekiness and flouting of conventional valuations of the important and self-important it has a gay buoyancy and independence of mind and spirit. By the time *Hail and Farewell* was finished Moore had trained himself to handle words with the precision and economy, the coolness and clarity, which made his next novel, *The Brook Kerith*, his finest achievement in fiction. While in its rejection of stylistic ornament and of turbulent feeling it brings prose down to the bedrock of verbal austerity, it does so not only without rejecting the natural beauty of good prose but actually reveals that beauty in a new light by stripping away more 'surplusage' than Pater would have dared to remove or would even have detected as there for removal. And since in both *The Brook Kerith* and *Héloïse and Abelard* (1921) Moore took stories with an adequate narrative line and brought to them a mind amply stored with supplementary material, the stripping process did not disclose

[1] See above, p. 263.

[2] Reprinted in the collected *Autobiographies* of W. B. Yeats (Macmillan, London, 1955).

(as was the case with the bulk of Pateresque writing by others) any paucity of content. Moore's final prose style is as different from his first as Cézanne's firm-structured peasants are from the fleshy odalisques of Ingres.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946), who had immense superficial influence while he was alive, lacked ballast and now seems to have been little more than a large vessel of cork bobbing about on a heaving sea. He was crammed with notions, none of which amounted to a valid idea steadily held, and his hollowness became evident when in his last years he lapsed into a frenzy of pessimism which was the outcome, mainly, of personal pique because of the failure of mankind to go his way. His 'way' had been in fact, from first to last, many diverging ways; and although he made most of the notion of a 'One World State', it was a notion that took little account of the necessities and comforts of human nature. Wells's *Outline of History* (1919), *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1932), and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), bulky compendious non-fictional works bought in vast numbers, demonstrated the stretch of his inquiring mind and also its fatal restlessness and want of depth. It would be pointless to number his books, for whether they total more or less than a hundred, Wells's contribution to English literature lies in less than a tenth of his whole output: his short stories,[1] in which he was a master; the scientific fantasies—e.g. *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), and others—which display in abundance a genuine inventive power, and may in the future prove to have as much prophetic insight as *The War in the Air* (1908); *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) combines humour, understanding of character, and unobtruded social criticism in balanced proportions which make this Wells's most enjoyable novel; and *Tono Bungay* (1909), possibly his best novel, though certain tricks of style have given it a somewhat outmoded air which a further passage of time may dispel. After about 1910 Wells became contemptuous of the novel *qua* novel and thereafter used it as a sociological and political and even religious washbag. At that stage he passed out of

[1] Originally published in several volumes with individual titles. Now available as *Collected Short Stories*.

literature into a half-world of high purpose and fruitless consequence.

The Forsyte Saga (1922), the major work of John Galsworthy (1867–1933) in fiction, is a gathering of several novels and shorter stories which began with *A Man of Property* (1908). This Forsyte sequence (continued in later volumes also), written in a disarming prose style poised between the luscious and the austere, the critical and the sentimental, gives 'the feel' of the period and catches a prosperous upper middle-class family at a historic moment before their kind were swept into the equalitarian trough.

The numerous writings of Arnold Bennett (1867–1931)—he was an industrious and excellent journalist as well as a novelist of unequal quality—can be winnowed without misgiving to leave *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), *Clayhanger* (1910),[1] and *Riceyman Steps* (1923). The first two, solid novels of character and environment, are set in the Five Towns, the pottery district of Staffordshire in which Bennett was born; the last-named is his only successful novel dealing with the London scene, Riceyman Steps being a down-at-heel passage-way in Clerkenwell, and the middle-aged hero a second-hand bookseller. Although Bennett was in aim a naturalistic writer deriving from the French realists, he was by birth and temperament an English provincial Victorian romantic possessed by an ineradicable sense of the wonder of life. He enjoyed with proper gusto his own success and the prosperity it brought, but his care and respect for good craftsmanship remained intact, though at times the necessity of maintaining his prosperity directed his talents to trivial ends.

It was less as a novelist providing reading matter than as a disturbing wind of gale force that D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) came into English literature in the years just before World War I. *Sons and Lovers* (1913) may be read as a portrait of the young Lawrence and his parents in their working-class home on the Nottingham coalfield. He gave up some years to the

[1] This novel was continued with *Hilda Lessways* (1911) and *These Twain* (1916), but neither equalled the first of the trilogy (collected in one volume as *The Clayhanger Family*, 1925).

irksome life of a school teacher, before success as an author permitted him to spend the rest of his life writing and travelling. He was consumptive and the physically-exacting fight against the disease was accompanied, as often, by febrile energy of mind and frenzy in creation. Lawrence was possessed by a missionary dæmon that convinced him he was set apart to lead his generation into a moral promised-land where vital sex experience could be elevated into a 'religion of the blood' giving release from the soul *v.* body conflict. That, ideally, Lawrence was right in his doctrine might be granted without involving the admission that he was right in his time and place, or that the fury with which he propagated his doctrine was tactful. It was unfortunate, too, that although he was an excellent 'ordinary' writer capable of producing excellent descriptive passages and with a latent command of all the qualities necessary to the composition of first-class 'normal' novels, he wallowed in a turgid psychological and psychiatric jargon whenever the relationships of his male and female characters were under examination. Few of his characters can be remembered as their named selves: they stand in memory as puppets for Lawrence, or as types and symbols. When the furore aroused by his ideas ceases to excite either moral reformers or moral reactionaries, his novels may stand up in their own literary right. Yet it seems more likely that they stand or fall by their ideas, and that when those have become accepted commonplaces or have been finally rejected, the novels may be found to have small fictional or literary interest. *Sons and Lovers* marks the turning point from novelist to missionary, and gives in its early part some indication of his extreme attachment to his mother. *Women in Love* (1920) and *Aaron's Rod* (1922) are characteristic of the several strains in the mature Lawrence novels. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928)—emasculated in the English-published editions—is poor as a novel but essential to a full view of the author's convictions. Lawrence also wrote excellent short stories, several travel books, and a quantity of poetry.

James Joyce (1882–1941) does not so much provide material for comment or discussion, as for assertion or denial. *Ulysses* (1922) is the greatest novel of the century or possibly of

any century to its admirers; to others it is partly obscene, partly unintelligible, partly unreadable, and (where readable) mainly dull and dismal. Through twenty-four hours in the lives of a group of people in contemporary Dublin it presents a view of humankind in a timeless and boundless aspect free from common inhibitions. The range and depth of Joyce's erudition have become legendary among his disciples and much is made of the claim that in construction *Ulysses* pays allegiance to Homer's *Odyssey*. But many other claims made for Joyce are irrelevant to literature, however astounding they may be in relation to miscellaneous (or even co-ordinated) learning and to music, for it is clear that Joyce—an anarchist in his treatment of language—came to use words more as notes in music than as instruments of logical statement. *Finnegans Wake* (1939), which was for some seventeen years a 'work in progress', carries verbal anarchy to a further stage. Whatever their true rank may be, and however that rank may be discoverable, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* must remain for the most part an esoteric possession of initiates and addicts armoured in their contempt for 'the hydra-headed rabble of the mental underworld' for whom Joyce did not write. His short stories, *Dubliners* (1914), and the autobiographical novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917), are intelligible but less remarkable.

There is general agreement that Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was an excellent prose writer, but her right to be named a good novelist continues in dispute. In her personal make-up sensibility and sensitiveness of apprehension were carried to the ultimate point, and she aimed in her novels to render with exquisite precision all the nuances and subtleties which were the commonplace (though agonizing) factors of her own mind, spirit, and emotions. Her error, if error it was, lay in the assumption that her own interior commonplaces were general to humanity, or to a large section of it. To those on her own social and cultural level it was a pleasing and flattering assumption; few who could read her at all would voluntarily declare that men and women are coarser and grosser than the projections of her self that, variously named and of whichever sex, serve as characters in Virginia Woolf's fiction. In *The Voyage Out* (1915) and until *To the Lighthouse* (1927) there are

links with common humanity which were refined away in *The Waves* (1931) and *The Years* (1937), though these have been considered her masterpieces. When as in *Orlando* (1928) she released herself from the conventions of the novel and wrote in a unique kind—part fantasy, part family history, part personal portrait of a friend—her readers, too, were released from the pressure of inappropriate form which is the bugbear of her novels. Her several volumes of essays and criticism, beginning with *The Common Reader* (1925), are of exceptional quality, though it is probably significant psychologically that she preserved to the end her illusion that 'the common reader' was her quarry. There has rarely been a writer whose appeal is more certainly to the uncommon reader.

Stevenson, Wells, and Kipling brought the traditional short story of plot, character, and incident to its terminal point. Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923) in *Bliss* (1920), *The Garden Party* (1922) and other volumes[1] started English short-story writers on a new track in which situation and atmosphere and less rigidly outlined characters share some of the qualities of Tchekov's stories. Katherine Mansfield had no successful followers, however, and short stories in the 1930s and 1940s became heavily social-conscience ridden and often turned into thinly-coated tracts for the times.

Miscellaneous Writings

Though G. K. Chesterton (1872–1936) and Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953) experimented in almost all departments of literature, they did not excel in any one above the rest. Both wrote a number of good poems and good essays; Chesterton wrote fantastic novels unlike any others; Belloc wrote history and historical biographies which are good to read though rarely objective; he also wrote excellent travel books, notably *The Path to Rome* (1902). Chesterton may be long remembered for his *Father Brown* detective stories (1911 onwards), and his novel *The Flying Inn* (1914) includes some of his best humorous-serious or serious-humorous verse.

[1] *The Collected Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield* appeared in 1945 (Constable, London); *Selected Short Stories* in 1953 (World's Classics).

W. H. Hudson (1841–1922), among numerous writings on birds and animals, achieved a masterpiece of the Wiltshire countryside in *A Shepherd's Life* (1910) and a fine autobiography treating largely of his childhood in Argentina, *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918).

The most startling book of its period and one that still provokes subterranean rumblings was *Eminent Victorians* (1918) by Lytton Strachey (1880–1932), followed by his *Queen Victoria*

Illustration by G. K. Chesterton

(1921). The first of these dealt with certain Victorian heroes—General Gordon, Florence Nightingale, Cardinal Manning (and Cardinal Newman), and Dr. Arnold—without the customary reverence and respect. The historical accuracy of *Eminent Victorians* has been repeatedly challenged and doubts on this head have to some extent obscured its excellence as a literary achievement. Strachey's object was not deliberately iconoclastic, not the wanton pulling down of idols, but the setting up of living men and women with merits and faults in place of conventional plaster saints. If this substitution confounded and dismayed many, it made many others see these

chosen characters for the first time as possible and in the main admirable human beings. But considered as literature Strachey's Victorian studies reach perfection in a quality—irony—which is rare in English writings. He was the most Voltairean author we have had. The quality he excelled in and the master he followed are anathema to the mass of Englishmen, who lack the agility of mind needed for delight in irony. Strachey's long saturation in French literature had given him a feeling for style which was equally un-English, and when a host of clodhopping imitators rushed in to produce 'lives' after the

Illustration from Belloc's *Cautionary Tales*

Strachey model, contemporary English biography presented for many years a more depressing and far more degrading spectacle than when solid Victorianesque mortuary tributes monopolized the field.

T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935) is still a figure in a modern legend. From being a scholar and archæologist before 1914 he became during World War I the successful and esteemed leader of the revolt of the Arabs against the Turks, and from that time he was known as the heroic Lawrence of Arabia. After the war and the new political alignments in the Arabian zone he sought obscurity in the Royal Air Force as an aircraftman under the assumed name T. E. Shaw. His account of the Arab campaign,

Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1926), written with great care and deliberation, is a monumental work in a highly conscious literary style. Lawrence's experiences during the campaign (he was captured—unrecognized—and brutally ill-used, but escaped within a day) gave a twist to his nature, and the passion he developed for self-effacement was probably not unlinked with that fundamental psychological upset. Brilliant though *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is as a record of events and as a portrait gallery of other personalities, it is hampered by the author's inability to let himself come through freely. His letters are more likeable and present a fuller personality than the Lawrence of Arabia legend allows for. His post-war period with the Royal Air Force is dealt with in *The Mint* (first published 1955), which may in the future have more significance as a psychological document than value as a work of literature

Initial letter from *Just So Stories* by Kipling

CHAPTER XXI

BERNARD SHAW AND CONTEMPORARY PLAYWRIGHTS

Casting back to the beginning of the century, we see an England recognizable only by those who lived in it and knew the sensation of existence in a stable world. Queen Victoria died on 22nd January 1901, having reigned more than sixty-three years, and was succeeded by her eldest son, then nearly sixty, as Edward VII. He had been jealously excluded from State business by his imperious mother, though, in her declining phase, ministers had kept him to some extent in touch with political matters. Edward's 'bonhomous' temperament and liking for Continental travel made him familiar with European affairs—the French named him 'the uncle of Europe'—and he was personally concerned in the negotiations for an alliance with France (the Entente Cordiale, 1904) as a bulwark against the increasing German military and naval strength. While his reign was peaceful and he himself known as Edward the Peacemaker, the international stage was being set for the calamities to follow. In its brief duration of less than ten years (the king died in May 1910) the Edwardian Age was an Indian summer of talent and splendour. At Court the aristocracy, diluted it is true by Edward's wealthy friends of somewhat less than noble origin, had its last taste of lighthearted magnificence and opulent display. Beautiful women, wonderfully gowned and jewelled, still made the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as dazzling a spectacle on the near side of the curtain as singers and designers could make it on the stage. Chivalry and courtesy, if also a loosening morality, ruled in the relationships between men and women; children had not wholly ceased to honour their fathers and mothers. Employers were still acknowledged as masters; honesty continued to be a generally accepted principle and policy in public and private life; religion maintained a confident face. Social inequality had not yet been put into reverse; gambling was still an aberration, not a national industry.

In music and art, Elgar and Wilson Steer were more than merely creditable figures. In literature inventive ability was still considered an asset by novelists and playwrights, among whom psychiatry had not yet taken charge, nor political and social consciousness become an intellectualistic fashion, nor sickness of soul a passport to prosperity and renown. Normality ruled.

Bernard Shaw

In the latest of his 'Pleasant' plays, *You Never Can Tell* (1898), Bernard Shaw heralded the new age through Mrs. Clandon, the imagined authoress of 'the Twentieth-Century Treatises' on Creeds, Conduct, Motherhood, Parents, and Children, as well as on Cooking and Clothing. And Gloria, the daughter, is introduced by her brother and sister as 'the Woman of the Twentieth Century'. As a reformer of creeds and customs, morals and manners, Shaw had the most deceptive of all gifts—genius. A reformer, if he is to be safe from un-understanding disciples and unintelligent imitators, should be humdrum, a plodder in whose footsteps a host of followers may tread without straying into folly or fantasy. Though he was the most illustrious member of the Fabian Society—by declared principle a society of plodders—Shaw was no more a Fabian in spirit than either Puck or Ariel. He combined in his own nature the swiftness of Ariel, the impishness of Puck, the intelligence of Solon, and the conscience of a Pilgrim Father. His feet were as frequently off the ground as on it, but his mind was equally confident in direction when airborne as when pedestrian. To his detractors he appeared flighty; the more unbalanced among his disciples were dazed by his brilliance. Neither party valued nor even detected his fundamental puritan earnestness nor (what he himself put in the forefront) his common sense and normality.

The normality of the Edwardian Age was the accepted normality of things as they were. Shaw's normality was the desired normality of things as they should be. 'My mind's eye, like my body's, was "normal": it saw things differently from other people's eyes, and saw them better.'[1] This was a bold claim, of the sort that angered many and led them to call him

[1] See Preface to Vol. I ('The Three Unpleasant Plays') of *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant.*

an intolerable egoist. It was beyond their comprehension that Shaw's sceptical intelligence was turned upon himself as particularly and objectively as it surveyed and investigated others. He knew himself, though it was not always to his purpose to reveal himself. Not only did he know himself, he also accepted himself. When self-knowledge is combined with self-acceptance a man is sound, integrated, whole; able to look at society with an eye neither jaundiced nor morbid, free from envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

A master of paradox in his writings, Shaw was also a living paradox. Setting up from the first as an anti-romantic, he retained in himself all the romantic virtues. He wanted marriage to be based upon commonsense and eugenics, i.e. upon the widest intermingling of the social classes, upon an adequate income, and upon healthy parentage. He saw romantic love as a trap into emotional slavery, and romantic chivalry and courtesy as bait for that trap. Yet, however unromantic his motive might be, he was himself impeccably courteous in bearing and chivalrous in mentality. He despised none. If he hit his opponents hard he was nevertheless incapable by nature of hitting below the belt. As a dramatic critic his castigations were numberless, yet he gave as close and serious attention to what he thought bad as to the good. He hated bad art and pretentiousness, but he hated them impersonally. His campaign against Irving's neglect of the new contemporary drama was not a campaign against the man Henry Irving, though Irving and others mistook its aim and purpose. Shaw believed that Irving and the Irvingesque theatre were posturing and declaiming in a blind alley.

As a social and political reformer Shaw was serious without solemnity. No plays are gayer than his, none more free from spleen. He desired peace and justice: peace without brutal conquest, or oppression, or revenge; justice as a balancing of the social scales, with neither the one-time upper-dog nor the one-time under-dog exercising dominion. Caesar (in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, 1899) was his ideal peacemaker; King Magnus (in *The Apple Cart*, 1929) gave warning of the perils of Demos triumphant.

Charged with irreligion, Shaw was in fact more austerely religious than the majority of those who declare or believe

themselves to be so. His asceticism—teetotal, non-smoking, vegetarian—was secular and humanitarian, though no doubt originating unconsciously in his ingrained ancestral puritanism. His life-motto may be found in Barbara's great cry (in *Major Barbara*, 1905): 'Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women'. The essential principle of Shaw's religion was that Good should have no reward; or, rather, that it should have no expectation of reward. Barbara prefaces her cry with the declaration: 'I have got rid of the bribe of heaven'. Though there was much in Christ's teaching to which Shaw conformed, as any man must who has even no more than a philosophical apprehension of the Good, he could not accept the formulated Christian dogmas. Doctrinal Christianity, he held, was no religion for a gentleman: a gentleman, in his conception, being one who cannot accept a blood sacrifice as the vicarious price of his own salvation, nor speculate upon a prudential relationship between faith or good deeds and an eternity of blessedness. He conceived of 'God's work' in its fullest aspect as the raising of Man towards perfection through evolution towards the Superman. The agent of this progress in Shaw's philosophy is the Life Force, operating through the mind and will of Man: the will as the power which determines him to hand on the torch of life burning brighter than when it was put into his hand; the mind as the directing agent for the practical fulfilment of that determination. Like Samuel Butler and others, Shaw attacked the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection and the Survival of the Fittest because it 'banished mind from the universe' and put Man into the position of being the will-less minion of blind forces. This is the theme of *Back to Methuselah* (1922), the preface to which is the full and final statement of Shaw's philosophy, first expressed at length in *Man and Superman* (1903) nearly twenty years before. The magnificent third act of that early masterpiece represents the conflict between the Will to Death and the Will to Life, with the Devil and Don Juan as protagonists. Since the work of the Life Force must be carried on from generation to generation through the birth of children fit for its great purpose, Shaw postulated that Woman was the prime mover, the selector of a father for the Superman. He threw overboard the conventional

notion that the man woos the woman into marriage, and substituted the idea that the woman pursues the man as the instrument to the fulfilment of her destiny through motherhood. A main source of comedy in his plays is the reluctance of the man to be caught in marriage, in contrast with the determination of the woman that he shall be caught. In these contests the familiar romantic note of courtship is deepened into a terrifying ecstasy of realization that an irresistible force is using the pair as instruments of a purpose greater than themselves. When Valentine in *You Never Can Tell* recognizes that he is in love with Gloria Clandon he says that it is 'As if Nature, after letting us belong to ourselves and do what we judge right and reasonable for all these years, were suddenly lifting her great hand to take us—her two little children—by the scruffs of our little necks, and use us, in spite of ourselves, for her own purposes, in her own way'. And John Tanner in *Man and Superman*, yielding at last to the determination of Ann Whitefield, cries 'The Life Force enchants me: I have the whole world in my arms when I clasp you. But I am fighting for my freedom, . . . for my self, one and indivisible'; and later '. . . What we have both done this afternoon is to renounce happiness, renounce freedom, renounce tranquillity, above all, renounce the romantic possibilities of an unknown future, for the cares of a household and family.'

From his earliest years George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) had seen marriage in an unromantic light. He was born in Dublin of a father who was not so much feckless as inadequate to cope with practical matters. His mother, finding soon after marriage that her husband was a heavy drinker and inept as the head of a family, cultivated her love of music and communicated it to her son, who received the main part of his formal education at the Dublin Wesleyan Connexional School and at the Central Model Boys' School before going into an estate agent's office as a junior clerk and afterwards cashier until April 1876, when he settled in London. Mrs. Shaw had preceded him, leaving her husband in Dublin, and she and her son and a daughter lived mainly on the proceeds of her work as a music teacher. Bernard Shaw earned little from his first efforts as a writer, but during those virtually barren years he trained himself as a public speaker in political matters in the open air as

well as at indoor meetings, overcoming his intense shyness by will-power and frequent practice. He wrote five novels between 1879 and 1883, but these attracted little attention until they were revived years later as the interesting first works of a famous playwright. In 1884 he became a socialist and joined the Fabian Society which was then becoming an influential body in the spread of socialism by gradual means, mainly through political education. From 1885 to 1898 Shaw lived as a practising journalist—book reviewer, art and music critic, and finally as the author of the *Saturday Review* articles already mentioned.

He first attempted playwriting in 1885 at the instigation of his friend William Archer, the translator of Ibsen's plays, but the effort remained a fragment until 1892, when he completed it for production by the Independent Theatre Society. *Widowers' Houses* made no particular mark, its revolutionary character being remote from the taste of the theatre public at that time, while its slum-housing theme was dead sea fruit to those who expected only lighthearted entertainment in the theatre. Nevertheless, when the play was revived nearly sixty years later it was found to be still abundantly alive, and though its problem is no longer apposite, the dialogue remains fresh and sparkling and the characters true to certain fundamental human traits. So is it also with *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894), which was banned from the stage for many years, since its subject, prostitution, however seriously discussed, was on the Censor's stop-list. *Arms and the Man* (1894), Shaw's first 'pleasant' play, an anti-war comedy, was followed by *Candida* (1895); *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), in which the framework and conventions of strong melodrama are made to carry an exposure of religious intolerance, was one of the *Three Plays for Puritans* (published 1901) which illustrated Shaw's conviction that romantic love interest, the mainstay of the contemporary theatre, was of subsidiary importance. So far, although his original talent was obvious to a sympathetic minority, Shaw had produced nothing of major importance, but when *Man and Superman: A Comedy and a Philosophy* appeared in 1903 (first performed 1905) his genius could no longer be in doubt. Thereafter he was the leading figure in the English theatre until his death, though he met continuous, if diminishing, opposition to the end. In addition to the works already referred to, his

principal plays are *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *Fanny's First Play* (1911), *Androcles and the Lion* (1911), *Pygmalion* (1913), *Heartbreak House* (1920), *Saint Joan* (1923), *The Apple Cart* (1929).

Heartbreak House has the force of a warning prophecy, directed to those who fail to learn that the safe voyaging of the ship of State is dependent upon a sure knowledge of the art of political navigation. *Saint Joan*, the most finished of Shaw's works, weighs the claims of private judgment against the demands of obedience to authority.

While all his dramatic writings are thesis plays, none is buried beneath its thesis. In his ability to write dialogue and create characters with a perennial interest, in his wit and humour, his epigrams and paradoxes, Shaw surmounted the limitations of the problem play, setting an example which none has had the natural talent or the acquired skill to follow with even a near degree of success. He held up a mirror to his age but also showed many aspects of humanity in all ages. If a preponderating Shavian reading of life can be deduced from the plays, the scores of characters nevertheless speak with individual voices, expressing opinions and convictions at variance with Shaw's own. If he attacked prejudices and destroyed illusions it was to the end that the prejudiced and illuded might mend their ways and construct, in the clearance he made, a firmer system of belief and a fairer standard of behaviour.

The Court Theatre, 1904–7

Appreciating that theatre audiences were not yet ready for his plays (he wrote in the preface to *Man and Superman* that he needed a pit[1] full of philosophers) Bernard Shaw published them in a form that would attract readers and so prepare an audience receptive to his subjects and methods. He printed fuller stage directions than had been customary before, embodying a descriptive commentary on the characters, action, and stage settings, and gave careful personal attention to the typographical presentation of the text, to the quality of the paper, and to the style of binding. He thus set a new standard for

[1] The 'pit' in London theatres at that time consisted of the half-crown unreserved seats behind the half-guinea front stalls. The audience in the pit was usually drawn from the more thoughtful section of the professional and lower middle classes. Most theatres have now absorbed the pit into the stalls.

printed plays, making them attractive to book-buyers, in contrast with the inferior style that had been general before. By adding lengthy prefaces he also gave the readers much additional material to supplement the plays. Through these means Shaw became a widely-read dramatist before he conquered the theatre, and when he at length did so it was largely because his plays in print had already created an instructed nucleus of sympathetic playgoers.

In Sloane Square, London, away from the fashionable west-end theatre district, the Royal Court Theatre came under the control of J. E. Vedrenne in 1904. Vedrenne had been business manager to leading actors before he went to the Court Theatre, where he superintended productions of Shakespeare which had only moderate success.

Progressive playwrights, Shaw among them, relied at first upon occasional performances by non-commercial organizations such as the Stage Society, founded in 1899 to give a hearing to plays rejected or ignored by west-end producers. The Stage Society gave the first performances of two or three of Shaw's early plays, and among its most active members was a versatile young actor, Granville Barker (1877–1946), who also had exceptional gifts as a producer, and was soon to be a distinguished playwright. Barker played Eugene Marchbanks in the Stage Society's performances of *Candida* in 1900, and was from that time an enthusiastic advocate of Shaw's work and aims. Vedrenne invited Barker to produce a Shakespeare play at the Court Theatre in 1904 and Barker agreed, on bargaining terms stipulating that Vedrenne should undertake to provide facilities for six afternoon performances of *Candida*. These were given in April and May 1904. In the following autumn Vedrenne and Barker began the partnership which was to make the Court Theatre the centre of the New Drama for the next two and three-quarter years (18 October 1904 to 29 June 1907).[1] No other single chapter in modern English theatre history has been so illustrious or so influential as this Vedrenne-Barker season. It introduced, besides new plays, a changed style of acting in which naturalism displaced the highly-charged

[1] For a full account, with detailed programmes, see *The Court Theatre, 1904–1907: A Commentary and Criticism*, by Desmond MacCarthy (A. H. Bullen, London, 1907).

emotional or rhetorical style of older actors. There were no permanent 'star' performers shining amid dimmer lights: all were accomplished players, none with a prescriptive right to the 'fat' parts, though Barker himself was best fitted by temperament and physique to play most of the leading Shavian characters. All the stage settings and appurtenances were as naturalistic as the acting, save in the two or three fantasies that were included. The adoption of the repertory system was of particular importance. Barker was convinced that the long-run system led to a progressive decline in the standard of acting and presentation, and that a succession of more than fifty performances of one play stereotyped the actors as well as exhausting their ability to *think* their parts and avoid lapsing into automatic speech. Moreover, if a single play monopolized the stage for a prolonged period, it denied opportunities to other authors. Accordingly, in the thirty-three months of the season thirty-two plays by seventeen authors were put on.

But since plays could not be imposed upon the audience according to any theoretical or statistical principle, the factor of relative popularity moderated the original intention of maintaining a steady proportionate balance of performances among the various playwrights' works. Of the thirty-two plays, eleven were Bernard Shaw's, and these accounted for 701 out of the total of 988 performances. No such access of popularity to a hitherto unpopular dramatist could have been foreseen. Some credit for this change in the public attitude may belong to Edward VII, who asked for a Command Performance of *John Bull's Other Island* (written in 1904) and no doubt attracted to the play many who had regarded its author as a suspect character. But while this dramatic comedy on modern Ireland was performed 121 times, it was outstripped by *Man and Superman* (176) and *You Never Can Tell* (149), so, whatever fillip the king gave to Shaw's reputation, it was Shaw's discovered attraction as an entertainer that established his fame. He had found or created his pit full of philosophers. It is not, however, by philosophy or whatever other serious matter that a playwright's work endures, but by his skill in presenting any such matter in agreeable form, through memorable characters and a distinctive personal style.

Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck*, and lesser pieces by

Hauptmann, Schnitzler, and Maeterlinck were included in the Vedrenne-Barker repertory, while Gilbert Murray's verse translations of *The Trojan Women*, *Electra*, and *Hippolytus* introduced Euripides' tragedies to a new non-academic audience which found them surprisingly 'modern' and responded encouragingly.

Votes for Women by Elizabeth Robins (1862–1952)—whose novels, *The Magnetic North* and others, are of more account—was a timely piece, for the militant female-suffrage movement had become a major political preoccupation. Of the remaining Court Theatre playwrights, the chief were John Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, and Granville Barker himself—besides W. B. Yeats, one of whose verse plays had nine performances.

Edward St. John Hankin (1869–1909) appeared at that time to be a more original and important writer than now. If not an Ibsen disciple he was swayed by Ibsenesque tendencies and contrariously tinctured with touches from Oscar Wilde. But he lacked both Ibsen's intellectual strength as a critic of social relationships and Wilde's wit and epigrammatic resource. His comedies have worn pale and thin, and in his later plays he seems to have been an enfeebled imitator of Shaw. Hankin's plays can only be fairly assessed, however, if they are considered in their period setting, when they had a pioneer interest and, up to the time of his early death, were pursuing a trail which was still mentally adventurous. The two plays by him done at the Court—*The Return of the Prodigal* (1905) and *The Charity that Began at Home* (1906)—were followed by *The Cassilis Engagement* (1907) and *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908).

Prunella; or, Love in a Dutch Garden (1906), a pierrot costume fantasy by Laurence Housman and Granville Barker, belonged to a fashion at present outmoded. Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), on the other hand, gives him a settled place in English drama. Edward Voysey inherits from his solicitor father a legacy of embezzlement of clients' trust funds, and his problem is whether he shall maintain his father's deception by continuing to pay interest to the clients from other sources while hiding from them the non-existence of their capital, and hope to restore gradually a sound financial position; or whether he shall declare the actual state of affairs and ruin the clients as well as himself. The great merit of the play is in the variety and

solidity of its large cast of characters. The plot has a genuine core, and in its construction *The Voysey Inheritance* has a sound architectural quality. It is faulty in being somewhat too weighty and humourless in its general tone, despite excellent passages of incidental humour. Barker had none of Shaw's verve and buoyancy of spirit; he could not as a playwright carry serious themes with the ease of one who has mastered them and sees them in a free perspective. Yet *The Voysey Inheritance* remains the most impressive play written in that period by anyone but Shaw. Of Granville Barker's other original works none had lasting merit, though the first act of *The Madras House* (1910) excited expectations which the remainder failed to justify.

The voluminous writings of John Galsworthy (1867–1933) have been drastically winnowed since his death. Among his many plays, only five need be named—*The Silver Box* (Court Theatre, 1906), *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910), *The Skin Game* (1920), *Loyalties* (1922). He brought to the drama his novelist's gift of creating characters solidly and in the round, with a shrewd eye upon individuality; and with a strong social sense he combined the ability to treat a serious theme within the compass of an engrossing plot. The care for economy of means which makes the opening scene of *The Silver Box* a model of succinct exposition tended in the plays of Galsworthy's final period to become an emaciation of substance and style, while his humanitarian pity declined into subjective sentiment. John Anthony in *Strife* is a typically monumental Galsworthy character of the kind he disapproved for its arrogant and heartless determination, yet admired against the pressure of his feelings for its rocklike genuineness. The basic issues in an industrial strike and the incidental sufferings it lays upon those who bear its consequences are unlikely to be more movingly shown than in *Strife*: the theme is treated once for all. *Justice*, a cry against the terror of solitary confinement in prisons, led to some amelioration of the system, but it is more than a piece for an occasion. *The Skin Game*, in its unification of public and personal problems and in its varied range of personalities the best of Galsworthy's plays, is mainly on the displacement of the well-bred cultured classes by the boorish newly wealthy; Jill Hillcrist is a representative 'Galsworthy girl', clear of head and sound of heart, wholesome, confident, direct, and courageous.

In *Loyalties* he dealt with the ugly matter of racial prejudice a decade and more before it became a madness infecting whole nations. Though its purpose was noble, *Loyalties* showed a decline in Galsworthy's dramatic skill: the characters are sketched rather than created and the dialogue is verbally impoverished.

The Irish Theatre

Until W. B. Yeats took a leading part in founding the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, Ireland had relied in the main upon plays written for the London stage, although the outstanding 'English' dramatists since the eighteenth century had been Irishmen. After engaging English actors and an English producer for the new Irish plays performed in its first three years, the Irish Literary Theatre became the Irish National Theatre Society in 1902 with native players, and in 1904 (supported by a wealthy English enthusiast for the theatre, Miss A. E. F. Horniman) it established itself at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and its company, The Irish Players, soon became world famous. Lady Gregory (1852–1932) was prominent in the affairs of the Irish Players, both as an administrator and as the author of a notable group of one-act plays, mostly comedies of peasant life, among them *Spreading the News* (1904) and *The Workhouse Ward* (1908). Her full-length plays were less memorable.

Apart from his initial originating impulse, Yeats's most important service to the Irish Theatre was his realization when he first met John Millington Synge (1871–1909) in Paris in 1899 that here was a potential great dramatist who could give his country the plays it needed. Synge was born in Dublin and educated at Trinity College there before he drifted away from his own land and people and moved aimlessly about on the Continent, writing little but journalistic stuff and second-rate verse. Following Yeats's advice he went back to Ireland and lived among the peasants of the Aran Islands, off the Galway coast, absorbing the rhythms of their speech, the spirit of their legends, and adopting their ways. This experience gave him the material and the language from which he made the plays which were to bring him fame and set him above all other Irish dramatists. The long-current impression that the dialogue

in Synge's plays is a literal transcription of actual peasant speech as he heard it on Aran does not stand examination. While it is true that he did not incorporate external language elements and preserved native speech rhythms, the dialogue is highly selective and pruned of the verbal superfluity which is common in all daily conversation. He was a poet in his prose, without being 'poetical'; and while he wrote that the popular imagination of Ireland was 'fiery and magnificent and tender' he saw his characters with an eye free from rosy illusion. He loved and understood the people of whom he wrote, and because he understood them he did not falsify them with trappings of make-believe. His humour is grim not sunny, sardonic not flattering. When his masterpiece in comedy *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) was produced at the Abbey Theatre, the house was in a state of riotous uproar for a week, since the play dispelled dear illusions of themselves cherished by the Irish. Inasmuch as it is universal, whereas *The Playboy* is in part local, *Riders to the Sea* (1904), a one-act tragedy, must be ranked as Synge's greatest achievement and perhaps also as the only true tragedy in modern literature, for it truly cleanses by pity and terror. His other plays are *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Tinker's Wedding* (1907), and the unfinished *Deirdre*.

J. M. Barrie and James Bridie

The whimsical humour that made (Sir) James Matthew Barrie (1860–1937) for some thirty years the most generally popular dramatist of his age has worked against his reputation since whimsicality went out of fashion under the impact of solemnity. *Peter Pan* (1904) has nevertheless maintained itself as an annual Christmas habit, and the opinion is held by some that the prevalence of mental and emotional immaturity may be traced to its commendation of the art of not-growing-up. It is probable that Barrie himself never grew up to complete adulthood, for his whimsical world was a place of imaginative personal refuge from what was to him the painful world of actuality. He was born at Kirriemuir in Scotland, educated at Dumfries and Edinburgh University, and made his way to London via journalism in the English provinces. He wrote several books, including an affectionate tribute to his mother (*Margaret*

Ogilvie, 1896), and three moderately well-received plays before achieving his first unquestionable success in the theatre with *Quality Street* (1901), a costume play in which the spirit of Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford* seems to be transported to the stage. *The Admirable Crichton* (1902) is the best of the full-length plays by him which do not call upon a fairy supernaturalism, and in its playful exploration of social equality in action it only fails to get to the root of the matter by turning its back in the last act, when Crichton the servant but natural ruler goes back willingly to servitude. Barrie's delight in exposing male egoism and presenting women as its shrewdly subtle deflaters produced *What Every Woman Knows* (1908) and *The Twelve-Pound Look* (1910), the latter the best of all one-act comedies. *Dear Brutus* (1917) and *Mary Rose* (1920) pass into the realm of fantasy and away from the level on which critical judgment is appropriate.

James Bridie (the pen-name of Dr. O. H. Mavor, 1888–1951) turned from medicine to playwriting, attracted by the new opportunities available to native writers when the company of Scottish National Players was started in 1921. It was in the London theatres that Bridie had his major successes, however, beginning with *The Anatomist* (1930). In the same year came *Tobias and the Angel*, the only one of his plays which, though less important in subject than some others, is excellent as a whole as well as in its parts, for Bridie was a restless (even a reckless) experimenter. Consequently, while very few of his plays are negligible and most have signs of indubitable genius, they are for the most part untidy in construction, and when greatness is evident it is also intermittent, as in *The Sleeping Clergyman* (1933), *Mr. Bolfry* (1943), and *Daphne Laureola* (1949). But in spite of these inequalities, Bridie was by far the most important playwright after Shaw, whose agile wit, impudent humour, and purposive mind appear to have been communicated in a limited measure to Bridie. The disputation between the Scottish minister McCrimmon and the devil masquerading as Mr. Bolfry is the only piece of modern dramatic writing in English that can stand comparison with passages in the third act of *Man and Superman*.

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES TO THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Colour Plate I (cf. text p. 200)

Charles Dickens, by Daniel Maclise, 1839, oil, $35\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.

This portrait was painted when Dickens was only twenty-seven but when he had already written the outstandingly successful *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist.*

Colour Plate II (cf. text p. 28)

William Blake, *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794, block print hand-coloured, $9 \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

This represents Mildew striking ears of corn and is one of the most exciting designs done by Blake.

Colour Plate III (cf. text p. 157)

Poetical Magazine, Vol. 1, May 1809, plate 1, *Dr. Syntax sets out*, aquatint by Thomas Rowlandson, $3 \times 4\frac{7}{8}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

'Incurious Ralph, exact at four,
Led Grizzle saddled to the door;
And soon, with more than common state,
The Doctor stood before the gate.
Behind him was his faithful wife,
"One more embrace, my dearest life!"
Then his grey palfrey he bestrode,
And gave a nod and off he rode.'

Colour Plate IV (cf. text p. 211)

Frederick Walker, *Philip in Church*, 1863, from *The Adventures of Philip*, by Thackeray. Water-colour, $17\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$ *in.* Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery.

1 (cf. text p. 20)

Vathek, motionless with surprise, by Richard Westall, R.A., *c.* 1795. Water-colour, $4\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* In the Victoria and Albert Museum, Dyce collection.

Richard Westall (1765–1836) was one of the most prolific early nineteenth-century book illustrators and his later work became highly mannered. He was at his best in water-colour, in which he used brilliant colours. At the end of his life he taught Princess (later Queen) Victoria painting and drawing.

The scene shows Vathek, motionless with surprise, discovering Nouronihar extended on the ground trembling and pale; it is one of three illustrations to *Vathek* in the Museum.

2 (cf. text p. 17)

John Rutter, *The Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*, 1823. Illustration (opposite p. 67) engraved by T. Higham after J. Martin, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 7$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

Fonthill, the most elaborate and astonishing monument to 'Gothic' taste in England, was built for William Beckford. The old house was pulled down in 1807 and rebuilding started almost at once to designs of James Wyatt. The new Fonthill was unsound in both construction and planning. The first tower fell down before it was finished and the second collapsed from lack of foundations soon after Beckford had sold it in 1822. The Great Hall could not be heated and was changed from a refectory into a state entrance to the chapel. But in spite of its faults it was one of the most imaginative buildings of the early nineteenth century.

3 (cf. text Chapter I)

New Morality;—or—the promis'd installment of the High-Priest of the Theophilanthropes, with the homage of Leviathan and his suite. Js Gillray, inv. & fec.—Published August 1st 1798 by J. Wright No. 169 Piccadilly, for the anti-Jacobin Magazine and Review. Engraving, 8×24 *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

As explained by Mrs. George in her *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* in the British Museum, this elaborate satire is an illustration of lines from Canning's *New Morality*, published 9 July 1798, also in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*.

The altar, dedicated to Justice, Philanthropy, and Sensibility is approached by a group of English Jacobins. Poets head the procession, carrying a large *Cornucopia of Ignorance*; Southey with an ass's head and hooves kneels in obeisance to Lépeaux; Coleridge also with an ass's head holds out *Coleridge Dactylic*[*s*]. The two frogs squatting beside the cornucopia holding up *Blank Verse by Todd and Frog* are Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb whose *Blank Verse* was published in 1798. The others in that group are Erasmus Darwin, whose *Zoonomia, or Laws of the Organic Life* was published in 1794 and 1796, Joseph Priestley and Gilbert Wakefield.

All the papers coming from the cornucopia are works by Jacobin writers and include *Maria, or the Wrongs of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Perdita Robinson's novel *Walsingham*, and *Knave or Not?* a comedy by Holcroft. Behind Priestley advances Leviathan, with the head of the Duke of Bedford, a barbed hook through his nose.

In the foreground are Tom Paine as a crocodile in stays, for Paine had been a staymaker in Thetford; Holcroft, wearing only leg-irons and spectacles; Godwin, an ass, reading his *Political Justice*; and lastly a serpent, advancing over *Williams's Atheistical Lectures*. David Williams published deistic lectures and opened a deistic chapel in London.

James Gillray (1757–1815) was a biting caricaturist freely ridiculing the royal family, the court, the nobility, and the ministry in outrageous fashion.

4 (cf. text p. 24)

William Blake, autograph manuscript, 1788–1820, p. 109. Pen and pencil. $7\frac{3}{4} \times 6$ *in.* In the possession of Mrs. William Emerson, Cambridge, Mass.

This note-book was used by Blake as a commonplace book for over thirty years. It contains his ideas on art, first drafts of poems, epigrams on his contemporaries, memoranda, and many slight sketches which were later to be used as illustrations for his books. Many of the *Songs of Experience* appear in draft, including this one of *Tyger*.

The manuscript is known as the *Rossetti Manuscript* because Dante Gabriel Rossetti bought the book in 1847 for ten shillings from William Palmer, brother of Blake's disciple, Samuel Palmer.

5 (cf. text p. 61)

William Blake, *Be Calm my Child*. Pen and sepia wash. $4\frac{7}{8} \times 2\frac{5}{8}$ *in.* Reproduced by courtesy of The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Rosenwald Collection.

This is one of the ten drawings done by Blake for the *Original Stories* of Mary Wollstonecraft, six of which were used for the first edition published in 1791. It is difficult to agree with Gilchrist, Blake's early biographer, who describes the designs as naïve and rude.

The drawing illustrates a passage in Chapter X. 'But the night will overtake us, we must make haste home. Give me your hand, Mary, you tremble; surely I need not desire you to remember this story—Be calm, my child, and remember you must attend to trifles; do all the good you can the present day, nay hour, if you would keep your conscience clear.'

6 (cf. text p. 47)

Sir Walter Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 1809. Illustration (opposite p. 46) by Richard Westall, R.A., engraved by Charles Heath. $4\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

'And, dar'st Thou, Warrior! seek to see
What heaven and hell alike would hide?'
Canto II, stanza V.

(For a note on Richard Westall, see no. 1.)

7 (cf. text p. 44)

Thomas Campbell, *The Pleasures of Hope*, 1799. Engraved Illustration (opposite p. 15) by R. Scott after J. Graham. $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

'When Venus, Thron'd in clouds of rosy hue,
Flings from her golden urn the vesper dew;
And bids fond man her glimmering noon employ
Sacred to love, and walks of tender joy.'

John Graham (1754–1817) was a Scottish artist of some talent. He was a successful teacher, among his pupils being David Wilkie and David Allan.

8 (cf. text p. 62)

Mrs. Opie, *Father and Daughter*, 1813. Frontispiece by John Opie, R.A. 5 × 2⅝ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

John Opie (1761–1807) was noted as a portrait and history painter. He married Amelia Alderson as his second wife. He became professor of painting of the Royal Academy and the series of lectures which he gave there are second in interest only to the *Discourses* of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

The scene illustrated is that where the father, Fitzhenry, is mad in Bedlam. His daughter, Agnes, who is visiting him 'saw that he had drawn the shape of a coffin and was then writing on the lid the name of Agnes'.

9 (cf. text p. 56)

Cheap Repository Tracts, *The History of Tom White the Postilion*, 1795. Engraved title-page by Thomas Bewick. 6¾ × 3¼ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

This tract bears an advertisement stating that copies would be 'sold to the gentry at 24 for 10d' for distribution to the poor.

Thomas Bewick (1753–1828) led a revival in the art of wood engraving. His works, especially the illustrations to his *Quadrupeds* and *Birds*, were among the most attractive produced at this time.

10 (cf. text p. 39)

Robert Burns by Alexander Nasmyth, 1787. Oil, 15⅛ × 12¾ *in.* In the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Alexander Nasmyth (1758–1840) was a leading portrait and landscape painter in Edinburgh. He was introduced to Burns and painted this portrait of him, which he gave to Mrs. Burns.

11 (cf. text p. 23)

George Crabbe, by H. W. Pickersgill. Oil, 29½ × 24½ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.

Henry William Pickersgill, R.A. (1782–1875) was a popular and prolific portrait painter. Among his sitters were Wordsworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Duke of Wellington, and Faraday.

12 (cf. text p. 59)

Fanny Burney, mezzotint after E. F. Burney, by C. Turner. 7¾ × 6½ *in.* From a negative in the National Portrait Gallery.

Edward Francis Burney (1760-1848) was a cousin of Fanny Burney, painting portraits and subject pictures, and exhibiting for many years at the Royal Academy. Charles Turner (1774–1857) was one of the most distinguished mezzotinters of his generation. He did over six hundred plates, of which about two-thirds were portraits.

13 (cf. text p. 59)

Fanny Burney, *Evelina*, Vol. II, 1794, engraved vignette from the title-page, by Joseph Collyer, the younger, after E. F. Burney. 2½ × 3 *in.*

E. F. Burney did three illustrations for his cousin's book, *Evelina*, of which one was used in the 1794 edition.
The scene illustrated comes from the end of the book where Evelina meets her father and is acknowledged by him.

14 (cf. text p. 69)
Samuel Rogers, *Poems*, 1838. Illustration (opp. p. 87) by J. M. W. Turner, engraved by H. le Keux. $3\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
Turner was much in demand for this type of romantic landscape illustration, and perhaps did too many for the standard to be very high.

15 (cf. text p. 69)
Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy*, 1st edition, 1800. Woodcut (from p. 27) by J. Anderson. $2\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
John Anderson (*fl.* 1799) was a Scottish pupil of Thomas Bewick (see note on no. 10).

16 (cf. text p. 92)
Robert Southey, *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*, 1824. Illustration (Vol. II, p. 157) engraved by C. Heath after Richard Westall, R.A. $3\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

'His loose robe this day
Is death's black banner, shaking from its folds
Dismay and ruin.'

(For note on Richard Westall, see no. 1.)

17 (cf. text p. 64)
Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, 1832. Illustration by W. Harvey, engraved by H. Robinson. $3\frac{5}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ *in.*, from a copy in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
The scene illustrated is that where Judy 'takes up the corner of her apron and puts it first to one eye and then to t'other, being to all appearance in great trouble'.

18 (cf. text p. 83)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, by Peter Vandyke, 1795. Oil, $21\frac{1}{4} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
Joseph Cottle wrote of this painting, done when Coleridge was twenty-three: 'this portrait of Mr. Coleridge was taken in oils by Mr. Vandyke (a descendant of the great Vandyke) . . . a better likeness was never taken; and it has the additional advantage of exhibiting Mr. C. in one of his animated conversations'.
Peter Vandyke (b. 1729) came from the Netherlands and worked in the studios of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Allan Ramsay. Towards the end of his life he worked in Bristol.

19 (cf. text p. 102)
Percy Bysshe Shelley, by Amelia Curran, 1819. Oil, $23\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
This is the only known portrait of Shelley done from life and the only known work of Amelia Curran.

20 (cf. text p. 95)
George Saunders, *Byron landing from a boat.* Oil, $42\frac{1}{4} \times 35$ *in.* Windsor Castle. Reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen.
This portrait of Byron at twenty-one was painted in 1809, just before he left England for his first tour of the Continent.
George Saunders (1774–1846) worked in Edinburgh, London and, possibly, America.

21 (cf. text p. 108)
Joseph Severn, *John Keats in his Study*, 1821. Oil, $22\frac{1}{4} \times 16\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
Severn, a close and devoted friend of Keats, nursed him through his last illness. This portrait was painted in the year of Keats's death, probably after it.

22 (cf. text p. 114)
John Keats, Manuscript copy of *Ode to a Nightingale.* $8 \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* In the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
There are very few corrections in this manuscript of the poem, which is as published except for the initial *My* which was re-included.

23 (cf. text p. 123)
Francis Stephen Cary, *Charles and Mary Lamb*, 1834. Oil, $44\frac{1}{2} \times 33\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
F. S. Cary (1808–80) exhibited at the Royal Academy and British Institution. He rarely painted portraits.

24 (cf. text p. 120)
Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*, 1807. *The Witches' Cauldron*, (opp. p. 215). $4\frac{3}{4} \times 3$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
This copper-plate was used as the frontispiece to *Macbeth.*

25 (cf. text p. 127)
J. H. Leigh Hunt, *Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres*, 1807. Title-page engraved by F. D. Soiren after R. Hunt. $6\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

26 (cf. text p. 131)
Thomas Love Peacock, *Sir Hornbook or Childe Launcelot's Expedition*, 1814. Illustration (opp. p. 25). $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
This book was written for children and describes the progress of Childe Launcelot on the road to knowledge, guided by Sir Hornbook and twenty-six men 'the first that came was mighty A, the last was little Z' under Captain Word and Corporal Syllable. Their encounters with the

various parts of speech are described in a clear ballad style, and the illustration here shows

'gentle Prosody,
More faire than morning beam;
Who liv'd beneath a flowering tree,
Beside a falling stream.'

27 (cf. text p. 45 and p. 145)
Sir Walter Scott, by Sir William Allan. Oil, 36 × 28 *in.* In the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.
Sir William Allan (1782–1850) was a distinguished Edinburgh history and portrait painter, particularly noted for his pictures of Russia, where he travelled for some years. He was a friend of Scott's, and besides this portrait and another of him in his study, Allan painted several scenes from Scottish history suggested by the novels of Sir Walter.

28 (cf. text p. 145)
Alexander Fraser, scene from *Peveril of the Peak*, by Sir Walter Scott. Oil, 17 × 13½ *in.* Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery.
Peveril embraces the landlady in thanks for a glass from her own peculiar bottle.
This painting was engraved for the title-page of the edition of the Waverley Novels published in Edinburgh in 1831.

29 (cf. text p. 156)
Thomas Moore, *Lalla Rookh*, 6th. ed., 1817. Illustration (opp. p. 198) engraved by Charles Heath after Richard Westall, R.A. 4½ × 3¾ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
'While the princess sat listening anxiously, with Fadladeen in one of his loftiest moods of criticism by her side, the young poet, leaning against a branch of the tree, thus continued his story.'
(For a note on Richard Westall, see no. 1.)

30 (cf. text p. 161)
R. H. Barham, *The Ingoldsby Legends*, 1840, Series 1. Illustration (opp. p. 268) by George Cruikshank. 5 × 3⅛ *in.*
The devil has just been unmasked from his disguise as a beautiful maid.

'The fiend made a grasp, the Abbot to clasp;
But St. Nicholas lifted his holy toe,
And, just in the nick, let fly such a kick
On his elderly Namesake, he made him let go.'

31 (cf. text p. 135)
Jane Austen, by Cassandra Austen. Pencil and wash. 4¼ × 3⅛ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
Done by her sister Cassandra, this is the only known portrait of Jane Austen.

32 (cf. text p. 157)
William Gilpin, *Observations relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty Made in the Year 1772, on several Parts of England; particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland*, 1786. View of Windermere. 4 × 6½ in. From a copy in the British Museum.

33 (cf. text p. 174)
Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Lays of Ancient Rome*, 1847, p. 62, drawn on wood by George Scharf, junior. 6½ × 5 *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
The illustration shows Herminius, Horatius and Spurius Lartius, 'keeping the bridge'.
This is an excellent example of a well-set page, pleasant to read with clear type.

34 (cf. text p. 163)
John Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 1827. Frontispiece engraved by Edward Finden after Peter De Wint. 4 × 3 *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
Peter De Wint (1784–1849), one of the most successful and prolific water-colourists of the early nineteenth century, was particularly successful with pastoral and riverside subjects.

35 (cf. text p. 175)
John Ruskin, by Sir John Everett Millais. Oil, 28¼ × 24. (Mansell Photograph.)
This portrait was painted in the autumn of 1853 at Glenfinlas. Ruskin, describes the setting, 'a lovely piece of worn rock with foaming water and weeds and moss, and a noble overhanging piece of dark crag; and I am to be standing looking quietly down the stream; just the sort of thing I used to do for hours together'.
In the next year the friendship of Millais and Ruskin ended when Ruskin's wife divorced him and married Millais. Ruskin, however, still magnanimously continued to further Millais's professional interests.

36 (cf. text p. 169)
Ford Madox Brown, *Work*. Oil, 53 × 77⅛ *in.* From the Manchester City Art Gallery. Signed and dated *F. Madox Brown, 1852–65*.
Rossetti describes this painting as illustrating 'all kinds of Carlylianisms'. This was the artist's deliberate intention, as is shown by the introduction on the extreme right of portraits of Carlyle and the Rev. F. D. Maurice, a leader of the Christian Socialist Movement. They represent the brain-workers who 'seeming to be idle, work, and are the cause of well-ordained work in others'. Also placed around 'The British excavator for a central group, as the outward and visible type of *Work*', are a hunchback, who typifies 'town pluck and energy contrasted with country thews and sinews'; the rich, shown as two ladies of whom the elder distributes tracts and the younger (a portrait of the artist's wife) whose 'only business in life is to dress and look beautiful for our benefit'; and a group of orphaned children. (These quotations are from Ford

Madox Brown's own description of the painting, which runs to five pages.)

37 (cf. text p. 187)
Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures Underground*, British Museum. Add MSS. 46700, 40v and 41r. $7\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* Inscribed 'A Christmas Gift to a Dear Child in Memory of a Summer day'.
Lewis Carroll was writing out and illustrating the original version of *Alice* for Alice Liddell at the same time as Tenniel was preparing the illustrations for the published version, expanded from 18,000 to 35,000 words. Some of Tenniel's drawings bear a marked resemblance to Lewis Carroll's own, but Tenniel, who was especially successful with animals, certainly improved upon Carroll's Mock Turtle.

38 (cf. text p. 187)
Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1866. Illustration (p. 141) by Sir John Tenniel. $4 \times 3\frac{3}{8}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
This is from the second edition of *Alice*, published in November 1865. The first edition, published earlier in 1865, was withdrawn when only forty-eight copies had been sold or given away, because Carroll complained of the printing. The difference between the two printings is said to be very slight.

39 (cf. text p. 189)
Anne, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, by Patrick Branwell Brontë. Oil, $35 \times 25\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
This badly damaged painting of the sisters was done about 1835 by their brother. Emily is second from the left and Charlotte on the right.

40 (cf. text p. 191)
Charlotte Brontë, *The Adventures of Mon. Edouard R. Crack by Lord C. Wellesley*. 22 February 1830. Manuscript, $2 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In Harvard University Library.
This is one of the tiny books written by Charlotte Brontë as a child. Her special heroes were members of the Duke of Wellington's family, and the scenes were mainly set in Africa, wildly imagined with the help of the Rev. J. Goldsmith's *Grammar of General Geography*.

41 (cf. text p. 194)
George Eliot, by F. W. Burton, 1865, chalk. $20\frac{1}{4} \times 15$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.

42 (cf. text p. 196)
George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 1861. 'It was one of their happy mornings.' $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
The scene shows Tom and Maggie Tulliver as children.

43 (cf. text p. 202)
Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, cover to Part IV, 18 August 1849. Designed by H. K. Browne. 5×7 *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

This is one of the yellow covers used to protect the serial parts in which many of Dickens's novels first appeared. Complete sets of the parts in their original covers are rare, but there are several in the British Museum.

44 (cf. text p. 205)
Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, 1837, illustration (opp. p. 358) by H. K. Browne ('Phiz'). $5\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
Sergeant Buzfuz is declaiming against Pickwick, who sits on the front bench with Perker, Mrs. Bardell and her son, Mrs. Cluppins, and Mrs. Sanders.

45 (cf. text p. 219)
Robert Browning, by Michele Gordigiani, 1858. Oil, 28 × 22 *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
Gordigiani was a Florentine painter of some talent; he painted this pair of portraits three years before Mrs. Browning's death.

46 (cf. text p. 219)
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, by Michele Gordigiani, 1858. Oil. 28 × 22 *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.

47 (cf. text p. 238)
Elizabeth Siddal by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, pen and pencil, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* Inscribed *Hastings May 1854.* In the Victoria and Albert Museum. (Crown Copyright Reserved.)

48 (cf. text p. 237)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damosel*, 1874. Oil, $59\frac{1}{2} \times 31\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.
The poem which this painting illustrates was first published in the second issue of *The Germ*, of February 1850. The first verse ran:

> 'The blessèd Damosel leaned out
> From the golden bar of Heaven:
> Her blue grave eyes were deeper much
> Than a deep water, even.
> She had three lilies in her hand,
> And the stars in her hair were seven.'

49 (cf. text p. 218)
Max Beerbohm, *The Poets' Corner*, 1904. Lithograph, $7\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* Reproduced by permission of Sir Max Beerbohm and Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd.
This is one of Max's brilliant series of caricatures of poets done in the last years of the nineteenth century.

50 (cf. text p. 265)
Geoffrey Chaucer, *Works*, 1896, p. 1, $15\frac{1}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

The colophon reads as follows:
'Here ends the Book of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer edited by F. S. Ellis; ornamented with pictures designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and engraved on wood by W. N. Hooper. Printed by me William Morris at the Kelmscott Press, Upper Mall, Hammersmith, in the County of Middlesex. Finished on the 8th day of May 1896.'

51 (cf. text p. 269)
Oscar Wilde by Sydney P. Hall, pencil, $6\frac{3}{4} \times 8$ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.
This is one of a series of forty-four sketches made in 1888–9 by Hall for the *Graphic* newspaper during the sitting of the Parnell Commission. The Parnell Commission 1889–90 enquired into the authenticity of letters in *The Times* said to have been written by Parnell excusing the Phoenix Park Murders. The Commission acquitted him of all charges.

52 (cf. text p. 247)
Charles Reade, *It's Never too Late to Mend*, Poster for the Royal Princess's Theatre, 4 October 1865, $12 \times 16\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In the Victoria and Albert Museum. (Crown Copyright Reserved.)
The Princess's Theatre, now entirely vanished, stood in Oxford Street.

53 (cf. text 245)
Bernard Partridge, Sir Henry Irving in *Becket* by Tennyson. Pencil, $13 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* In the Victoria and Albert Museum. (Crown Copyright Reserved.)
Bernard Partridge did a considerable number of drawings of actors for the *Illustrated London News*.

54 (cf. text p. 280)
Edouard Manet, *George Moore in Paris*. Oil, $26 \times 31\frac{1}{2}$ *in.* (Mansell Photograph.)
This sketch was done in about 1879 at the Café de la Nouvelle Athène. There is another oil sketch and a pastel of George Moore done by Manet at about this time.

55 (cf. text p. 273)
William Butler Yeats, by Augustus John, etching, 7×5 *in.* From a copy in the National Portrait Gallery.
Augustus John (b. 1878) is perhaps the greatest living English portraitist.

56 (cf. text p. 260)
Thomas Hardy by Augustus John, black chalk, $13\frac{7}{16} \times 9\frac{9}{16}$ *in.* In the Fitzwilliam Museum. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

57 (cf. text p. 278)
Joseph Conrad by David Low, September 1923, black chalk and wash. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

This caricature of Conrad appeared as a supplement to *The New Statesman* of 13 February 1926.

58 (cf. text p. 290)
Bernard Partridge, *Ahenobarbus at Rehearsal*. Black chalk.
This drawing of Shaw was done at a rehearsal of *Arms and the Man* for its first performance at the Avenue Theatre, London, on 21 April 1894, in which Bernard Partridge played the part of Saranoff under his stage name of Bernard Gould. Photograph in the Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

59 (cf. text p. 300)
John Butler Yeats, *Synge at Rehearsal*, 25 January 1907. Reproduced by permission of Mr. Jack B. Yeats.
John Yeats (1839–1922) was the father of W. B. Yeats.

60 (cf. text p. 284)
Virginia Woolf by Francis Dodd, 1908, pencil, 8 × 6½ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.

61 (cf. text p. 283)
James Joyce by Jacques Emile Blanche, 1935. Oil, 49¼ × 34½ *in.* In the National Portrait Gallery.

62 George Bernard Shaw, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God*, 1932. Title page designed by John Farleigh, 6¼ × 4 *in.* Reproduced by permission of the Public Trustee and the Society of Authors. This is an excellent modern example of woodcut illustration, which, because of its affinity to type itself, has been used almost continuously from the invention of printing to the present day.

Text illustration, p. 5
The Contrast, 1792, actual size. From a copy in the British Museum.
This popular ballad sheet is a typical example of anti-Jacobin propaganda. The words were to be sung to the tune of *Hearts of Oak*.

Text illustration, p. 22
William Cowper, *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*, a broadsheet published about 1790. 19½ × 14¾ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.
The poem, perhaps the most popular of all Cowper's works, was written in 1782 and printed in the *Public Advertiser*. In 1785 it came to the notice of the actor, Henderson, who introduced it into recitations he was giving. It immediately had an astonishing success, one bookseller selling six thousand copies.
This is a copy of a broadsheet, published with crude wood-cuts, by 'T. Bloomer, letter press and copper plate printer, Birmingham'.

Text illustration, p. 34
Gilbert White. *The Garden-Kalender* for the year 1751. Entries for March. Approximately two-thirds size. British Museum Add. MS. 35139 f. 3r.

White's Garden Diaries from 1751–71 are in the British Museum. He was evidently fond of melons and cucumbers, for they are very frequently mentioned in the diaries. This particular bed was unlucky, for opposite the entry for March 22 he notes: 'This bed, by means of the great rains lost its Heat, so that the cucumbers, melons and squashes never came up'.

Another recurrent entry, which would stir envy in many present-day gardeners, is the *borrowing* of cartloads of dung from local farmers—in 1759 as many as thirty-two loads.

Text illustration, p. 41

Robert Burns, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, original manuscript, opening lines, same size. Reproduced by permission of The Burns Society, Irvine.

The poem is headed by four lines from Gray's 'Elegy' and is inscribed to R. A——, Esq.

This copy, in Burns's hand, is that which he sent to the printer, John Wilson of Kilmarnock, and was used for the 1786 edition by Wilson of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect.*

Text illustration, p. 69

Samuel Rogers, *Poems*, 1812, p. 171, woodcut by Luke Clennell after Thomas Stothard, same size. From a copy in the British Museum. This woodcut heads the poem 'A Wish'. Thomas Stothard, R.A. (1755–1834) was the most distinguished and prolific book illustrator of his generation, and these illustrations are among his most charming designs. Luke Clennell (1781–1840) was a pupil of Bewick.

Text illustration, p. 81

William Wordsworth, *We are Seven*, 1840, 5 × 2¾ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

This is one of a series of popular cheap books published for children.

Text illustration, p. 88

Professor Porson, *The Devil's Walk*, 1830, illustration (opposite p. 10), by Isaac Robert Cruikshank, engraved on wood by Bonner. 3 × 3½ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

Professor Porson was a pseudonym for S. T. Coleridge and Robert Southey.

Isaac Robert Cruikshank (1789–1856), brother of the more famous George Cruikshank, was a popular caricaturist, especially of the follies of fashion.

Text illustration, p. 102

George Cruikshank, *Forty Illustrations of Lord Byron*, 1825. 3¾ × 4½ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

George Cruikshank (1792–1878) was a celebrated illustrator and caricaturist.

Text illustration, p. 148

Sir Walter Scott, corrected page proof of *Woodstock*, Vol. II, p. 317, 1826, actual size. From a copy in the British Museum.

The proofs of Scott's novel were first corrected by James Ballantyne, the publisher, whose comments are outspoken: 'This peculiarity has been described before, somewhere' and 'Altogether incorrect and unintelligible'. Scott's replies to these criticisms and the changes made in consequence are also on these sheets.

Woodstock was published as 'by the Author of Waverley', and the author's identity was a secret closely guarded from the public. Ballantyne copied the corrections on to another set of proofs which were sent to the printer, so that Scott's handwriting might not be recognized by visitors to the printer's shop. The fact that this set of proofs was not used by the compositor accounts for its cleanness.

Text illustration, p. 209

M. A. Titmarsh (William Makepeace Thackeray), *The Rose and the Ring*, 1855. Illustration (opposite p. 53). $4\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{8}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

Thackeray did illustrations for several of his novels and those for *The Rose and the Ring* are among the most successful. Here Prince Giglio is declaring his love for Betsinda, while, in the doorway, Prince Bulbo tears out his hair.

Text illustration, p. 213

Anthony Trollope, *Framley Parsonage*, 1861, illustration (Vol. II, opp. p. 254) by Sir John Millais, $6\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

Sir John Everett Millais (1829–96), was the most successful Pre-Raphaelite painter. He was elected A.R.A. in 1853, R.A. in 1863 and became President of the Royal Academy in 1896, having been created a baronet in 1885.

Text illustration, p. 225

Robert Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, 1868, title page of Vol. I. $6\frac{5}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

This copy was given by Browning to F. T. Palgrave, Professor of Poetry at Oxford and compiler of *The Golden Treasury*.

Text illustration, p. 232

Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, 1869, illustration (opp. p. 350) by Arthur Hughes. $4\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$ *in.* From a copy in the British Museum.

Arthur Hughes (1832–1915) was one of the Pre-Raphaelite painters; among his best-known paintings are *April Love* and *The Long Engagement*. He did a large number of illustrations including those for Christina Rossetti's *Sing Song* and George Macdonald's *At the Back of the North Wind* and *The Princess and the Goblin*.

Text illustration, p. 262

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Life and Death of a Man of Character*, autograph manuscript 1886. $7\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$. In the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester.

Casterbridge is Dorchester and Hardy gave this manuscript to the Dorset County Museum there. The manuscript was written in exercise books, which were later bound together.

Text illustration, p. 267

Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, 1894, 'The Dancer's Reward', by Aubrey Beardsley, 7×5 *in.* Reproduced by permission of John Lane, the Bodley Head, Ltd.

Aubrey Beardsley (1872–98) was typical of the cynicism and restlessness of the 'nineties, and his work aroused considerable hostility. His brilliant, mannered designs for Salome are among his best works, and in designing for the new line-block process he invented a fresh technique in illustration.

Text illustration, p. 286

G. K. Chesterton, *Club of Queer Trades*, 1905. Illustration by Chesterton from 'The Reason of the Vicar's Visit'. $4 \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ *in.* Reproduced by permission of Miss D. E. Collins and Messrs. Harper and Brothers.

Text illustration, p. 287

Hilaire Belloc, *Cautionary Tales for Children*, 1907, illustration by B. T. B. from 'Jim, who ran away from his nurse and was eaten by a Lion'. Actual size. Reproduced by permission of Messrs. Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.

Text illustration, p. 288

Rudyard Kipling, *Just so Stories*, 1902. Initial letter by Kipling from 'How the first Letter was written'. Same size. Reproduced by permission of Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

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